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# Women's Experiences of Mindfulness in Romantic Relationships

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Melissa Jay

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Women's Experiences of Mindfulness in Romantic Relationships

by

Melissa Jay

MC, Athabasca University, 2011

BA, University of Saskatchewan, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Psychology

Walden University

December 2018

## Abstract

Mindfulness has been found to enhance romantic relationships through the practice of remaining open, calm, and emotionally regulated during times of struggle. There was a gap in the literature, however, related to how the practice of mindfulness is subjectively experienced in women's romantic relationships. The purpose of this heuristic study was to understand how women's practice of mindfulness effects their romantic relationships. The conceptual framework for this study was mindfulness-to-meaning theory, which highlights that wellbeing is supported through 2 main mechanisms of mindfulness: savoring and reappraisal. The nature of this study was a qualitative approach using Moustakas's heuristic method. After the data were collected through semistructured interviews, 6 themes were identified. The themes were (a) heightened presence in the relationship; (b) enhanced emotional regulation within the relationship; (c) expanded awareness in the relationship; (d) stronger connection to self and partner; (e) increased gratitude for self, partner, and their shared life; and (f) continued growth in the relationship. Women identified feeling a sense of enhanced emotional regulation within the relationship which enables them to remain calm, less reactive, and better able to communicate with their partners during times of difficulty. The findings from this study confirmed and expanded previous research. This study may enhance understanding of how mindfulness may lead to deeper connection and stability in romantic relationships. By doing so, this study may also contribute to positive social change by informing the work of those in the wellness industry who provide support to women.

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## Dedication

To my co-researchers, this research was made possible because of you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for being vulnerable with me. It was an honor to sit with you and hear about your experiences. May each of you continue to cultivate presence, emotional regulation, awareness, connection, gratitude, and continual growth, in all of your relationships.

To my girlfriends, you are my sisters, thank you for your love, always. It is through your consistent support and guidance that I have come to believe that anything is possible, through connection. May each of you know how truly loved you are.

To my spouse, Michael, I have such deep gratitude for your loving support, patience, and for meeting me just as I am. It is a joy to learn and grow with you, every day. May you always embrace yourself with the same unconditional love you practice with me.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Mindfulness has been defined as present-moment awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Shapiro, 2009), with the intention of attending to one thing at a time while remaining calm and open to insights of oneself and others (Bodhi, 2011). Emotional regulation, through mindfulness, has been found to support women in feeling relaxed and secure in their romantic relationships (McCreary & Alderson, 2013). Emotional regulation has been described as decreasing automatic emotional reactivity by regulating an individual's nervous system, resulting in more emotional acceptance (Adams, Stoops, & Skomro, 2014; Gander & Buchheim, 2015; Karremans, Schellekens, & Kappen, 2017; Kotsou, Leys, & Fossion, 2018).

Mindfulness has many intra and interpersonal benefits. Through the practice of mindfulness, emotional regulation can support restful sleep, stress management, and an enhanced sense of awareness for oneself and others (Cordon, Warren Brown, & Gibson, 2009; Goodall, Trejnowska, & Darling, 2012; Pepping, Davis, & O'Donovan, 2013). People have also reported that emotional regulation leads to feeling connected to themselves and others in the present moment (Klatt, Buckworth, & Malarkey, 2009; Valente & Marotta, 2005). Due to the promise of mindfulness in interpersonal relations, I designed a heuristic study to understand how the practice of mindfulness affects women's romantic relationships. For this study, romantic relationships referred to marriage or committed life partnership.

Specifically, there was a need to better understand how the practice of mindfulness is experienced, subjectively, within relationships (Davis, Morris, & Drake, 2016; Garland, Kiken, Faurot, Palsson, & Gaylord, 2017; Quaglia, Goodman, & Brown, 2015; Wachs & Cordova, 2007; Webb, Phillips, Bumgarner, & Conway-Williams, 2013). Using Moustakas's (1990) heuristic method, I sought to understand the lived experiences of women practicing mindfulness and how it effects their romantic relationships. By relying on mindfulness-to-meaningtheory as the guiding framework, this heuristic study aimed to provide a source of understanding of the themes and experiences related to how women's practice of mindfulness impacts their romantic relationships. The social change implications of this study are centered on the importance in uncovering the nuances of mindfulness and emotional-regulation in romantic relationships. This study may enhance understanding of how mindfulness may lead to deeper connection and stability in romantic relationships. By deepening self-awareness, authenticity, and well-being, an individual's ability to tolerate stress in relationships strengthens by remaining calm and regulated during times of struggle (Guina, 2016). In this chapter, I present the background on mindfulness and romantic relationships, the research problem, the purpose of the study, the research question, the conceptual framework, the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, concluded with a summary.

### **Background**

Recent research on mindfulness in romantic relationship has relied primarily on self-report measures and quantified as effective (Hertz, Addad, & Ronel, 2012; Siegel,

2014; Wachs & Cordova, 2007; Webb et al., 2013). Based on my review of the literature, however, it was not clear how the practice of mindfulness supported romantic partners individually. By better understanding how women perceive and describe how their practice of mindfulness effects their relationships, I sought to identify the subtle aspects of mindfulness in romantic relationships as perceived and experienced over time.

Numerous quantitative studies have confirmed that the practice of mindfulness, or present-moment awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), is a strategy used to obtain and maintain emotional regulation (Davis et al., 2016; Karremans et al., 2017; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Pepping et al., 2013). Mindfulness in romantic relationships has been linked to heightened relational connection and emotional regulation (Cordon et al., 2009; Goodall et al., 2012), perceived partner support (Williams & Cano, 2014), emotional security (Hertz et al., 2012; Siegel, 2014), enhanced attention and self-awareness (Tang & Tang, 2015), and enhanced sexual intimacy (McCreary & Alderson, 2013).

This current study was based on an in-depth review of the recent literature on mindfulness in romantic relationships. Research was needed to help fill the gap within the literature related to understanding how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships. This study provides insights into how the practice of mindfulness supports connection and security within women's romantic relationships which may be useful for helping professionals and mindfulness practitioners alike.

### **Problem Statement**

Past research has determined that insecurity in romantic relationships is connected to a hyper-active autonomic nervous system which may lead to emotional dysregulation, heightened heart rate, insomnia, and adrenocortical activity (Adams et al., 2014; Gander & Buchheim, 2015). Without knowing how to support oneself with an emotional regulation practice, individuals can become dysregulated in their primary relationships, leading to the experience of fear of neglect, hurt, rejection, and emotional or physical pain (Adams et al., 2014; Goodall et al., 2012). Also, the inability to tolerate stress in relationships has been found to lead to social isolation and/or loss of primary relationships (Guina, 2016). The practice of mindfulness has been classified as an emotional regulation practice (Goodall et al, 2012; Pepping et al., 2013). By developing an emotional regulation practice, like mindfulness, people have identified feeling calm, safe, steady, and emotionally secure in their relationships (Hertz, et al., 2012; Goodall et al, 2012; Pepping et al., 2013).

Mindfulness has been found to support emotional regulation by deactivating the nervous system and in turn, enhancing stress management, sleep, and a deeper sense of awareness for self and others (Cordon et al., 2009; Goodall et al., 2012; Pepping et al., 2013). Hanley, Warner, and Garland (2014) found that mindfulness practitioners experienced a greater sense of well-being in their daily activities, than those who do not have a practice of mindfulness. The human experience of remaining emotionally regulated through mindfulness supports people in remaining calm and grounded within their primary relationships (McCreary & Alderson, 2013; Pepping et al., 2013; Pepping,

Davis, & O'Donovan, 2015). Based on the preliminary review of literature, further qualitative research was needed in order to better understand the subjective experience of mindfulness in relation to women's romantic relationships and more information on this topic led to insights into the benefits of remaining emotionally regulated during times of relational stress.

The practice of mindfulness enables couples to be receptive and open in the present while promoting acceptance of each other and healthy communication (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). By enhancing distress tolerance, partners tend to respond with empathy and compassion, linked to relational health and decreased reactivity to anger (Beckerman & Sarracco, 2011; Hertz et al., 2012; Siegel, 2014; Webb et al., 2013). Due to findings supporting mindfulness in relationships, researchers identified need for more studies in the area of mindfulness in romantic relationships, specifically related to integrating mindfulness into couples' therapy (Atkinson, 2013; Beckerman & Sarracco, 2011), a deeper understanding of mindfulness within romantic relationships (Karremans et al., 2017), and more insights into how mindfulness supports positive connection in romantic relationships (Kozlowski, 2013). As such, researchers identified a need to better understand how the practice of mindfulness is experienced, subjectively, within relationships (Davis et al., 2016; Garland et al., 2017; Quaglia et al., 2015; Wachs & Cordova, 2007; Webb et al., 2013). Specific to this research, I identified a gap in the literature regarding how the practice of mindfulness is subjectively experienced in women's romantic relationships.



### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this heuristic study was to explore how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships. For this study, romantic relationships referred to marriage or committed life partnership. There was a need for increased understanding of women's experience of mindfulness in relationships. It is in the present that people are most regulated and connected to themselves and others (Klatt et al., 2009; Valente & Marotta, 2005). Based on a preliminary review of the literature, one qualitative study was found on mindfulness related to romantic relationships (McCreary & Alderson, 2013). In that study, McCreary and Alderson (2013) explored how women's practice of mindfulness meditation impacted their experience of sexual intimacy. In contrast, this study focused on how women's practice of mindfulness meditation effects their experience in romantic relationships, with a primary focus on emotional intimacy.

### **Research Question**

How do women perceive and describe the effect of mindfulness practice on their romantic relationships?

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Mindfulness-to-Meaning Theory**

The conceptual framework for this study was mindfulness-to-meaning theory (MMT) (Garland, Farb, Goldin, & Fredrickson, 2015a). Essential to this research study, MMT emphasizes that emotional regulation and wellbeing are promoted and enhanced through two primary mechanisms of mindfulness: savoring and reappraisal (Garland et

al., 2015a). Savoring was defined as a self-reflective process aimed at noticing the pleasurable features and positive emotions connected to various experiences (Garland, Farb, Goldin, & Fredrickson, 2015b). Reappraisal was defined as a form of self-evaluation of an individual's cognitive-affective processing to enhance wellbeing. MMT was also created to define how mindfulness encourages wellbeing and empowers people to shift from stress to self-awareness, leading to positive psychological processes and a deeper sense of meaning (Garland et al., 2015a).

With an emphasis on meaning making, MMT supported the intention of heuristic research, as described by Moustakas (1990). Heuristic studies explore personal meaning through understanding the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1990). My research question guides the experience of understanding within this method. By adopting a nonevaluative state of mind, one can make positive re-evaluations of life-experiences which supports change through acceptance (Garland et al., 2017). For these reasons, mindfulness-to-meaning theory was used as the conceptual framework with the intention of understanding how women perceive and describe the practice of mindfulness and the effect it has on their romantic relationships. A more detailed analysis of MMT will be provided in Chapter 2.

## **Nature of the Study**

### **Qualitative**

Through this qualitative study, I sought to understand the lived experiences of women practicing mindfulness and how it effects their romantic relationships. Moustakas's (1990) heuristic method was used. The research question guided the

exploration of personal meaning through understanding the lived experiences of each *co-researcher*, the term used for participants in heuristic studies (Moustakas, 1990). Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data and Moustakas's (1990) data analysis process will be used to handle and analyze the data. Moustakas's (1990) phases of heuristic inquiry were used as a guide to ensure full appreciation for each co-researcher's lived experience. MMT supported the heuristic study by honing my focus on understanding how women perceive and describe the practice of mindfulness and the effects it has on their romantic relationships.

Heuristics shift away from quantifying experience to, instead, extending the search into the phenomenon of human experience (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic studies explore personal meaning through attempts to understand the lived experiences of the participants. By collecting individual perspectives, this study sought to discover and clarify emerging themes related to women's personal practice of mindfulness in relation to their romantic relationships.

After the data was collected through semi-structured interviews, it was synthesized and organized with the intention of describing the experiences of each co-researcher. Heuristic research is used to investigate the meaning of human experiences which may lead to future investigation through research. Beginning with the formation of a research question, heuristic inquiry then moves through the phases: incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis of each co-researcher's experience, including my own, until full appreciation for each individual story is obtained (Moustakas, 1990). I then analyzed the data by reflecting on, exploring, and describing

the themes and nuances that accurately portrayed how women perceive and describe the practice of mindfulness and the effect on their romantic relationships. Following additional immersion, I created several exemplary portraits, unique to the co-researchers, and characteristic of the entire group. Last, I created a synthesis reflective of my own intuition and knowledge of the stories and meaning, to honor each individual while also representing the group findings (Moustakas, 1990).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 women living in Alberta, Canada, in a committed relationship, who were currently practicing mindfulness meditation and had been involved in this practice for at least 6 months. In a heuristic study, the researcher must also meet the criteria of a being a participant in the research, and include their experience with the phenomena. Co-researchers were recruited through word of mouth, by posting a recruitment poster on Alberta-based mindfulness Facebook groups, as well as on community announcement boards at wellness centers.

### **Definitions**

*Emotional regulation:* Emotional regulation has been defined as an individual's ability to regulate their nervous system and, in turn, their emotional responses through emotional acceptance and shifting away from automatic emotional reactivity (Adams et al., 2014; Gander & Buchheim, 2015; Karremans et al., 2017; Kotsou et al., 2018).

*Eudaimonic wellbeing:* Eudaimonic wellbeing is an individual's authentic true nature, purpose, and meaning in life (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Ryff, 2014).

*Mindfulness:* Mindfulness has been defined as present moment experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Shapiro, 2009) and

found to enhance emotional regulation through relaxing an individual's nervous system and, in turn, supporting restful sleep, stress release, and an enhanced sense of awareness for self and others (Cordon et al., 2009; Goodall et al., 2012; Pepping et al., 2013).

*Mindfulness meditation:* Mindfulness meditation the intentional practice of focusing attention on breath, an object, external or internal sensations, thoughts, or feelings (Karremans et al., 2017) so that when the meditator's attention shifts away, they use nonjudgment as a means of coming back to focusing their attention (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

*Positive reappraisal:* Positive reappraisal is a psychological process used to reconstruct stressful events as meaningful or growth-promoting (Garland et al., 2015a) and has been defined as central to contemporary theories of emotional regulation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

*Romantic relationships:* For the purpose of this study, romantic relationships referred to marriage or committed life partnership (Klatt et al., 2009; Valente & Marotta, 2005).

*Savoring:* For the purpose of this study, savoring referred to a self-reflective process aimed at noticing the pleasurable features and positive emotions connected to various experiences (Garland et al., 2015a).

### **Assumptions**

I assumed that each participant responded authentically and accurately during the semi-structured interview process. This was also assumed when participants provided additional data, such as journal entries and personal reflections during the interviews

(Moustakas, 1990). The subjective experiences of each participant were considered valid perspectives of truth.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 women living in Alberta, Canada, in a committed relationship, who were currently practicing mindfulness meditation and had been involved in this practice for at least 6 months. In a heuristic study, the researcher must also meet the criteria of a participant and include their experience with the phenomena. Also, I decided to narrow this inquiry to women because I cannot personally speak to the experiences of men, who have been found to perceive romantic relationships differently than women (Monteoliva, Garcia-Martinez, Calvo-Salguero, & Aguilar-Luzon, 2012). Future research could explore the experiences of men.

Transferability is described as the degree to which the findings can be related to other settings (Twycross & Shields, 2005). As in all qualitative research, transferability is not the aim as the findings from this heuristic research study are not meant to be generalized because it is autobiographical and focused on rich personal analysis and self-reflection (Grey, 2009). As a result of this method, thick detailed description of lived experiences can enable readers to decide if the people and events may apply elsewhere (Twycross & Shields, 2005).

### **Limitations**

In this study, I explored how women perceive and describe how their practice of mindfulness and the effects of mindfulness on their romantic relationships. Based on the

methodology, the findings are limited to the research participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1990). Individual perspectives help to deepen the understanding of social phenomenon, like mindfulness in romantic relationships, through the exploration of subjective experience. Moustakas (1990) noted, heuristics moves away from quantifying experience to explore the phenomenon of human experience. Therefore, the insights gained through this study are partial and must be understood in the context of a more holistic view of how the practice of mindfulness influences and effects romantic relationships.

In a heuristic study, the researcher meets all criteria of the participants and is included in the study (Moustakas, 1990). Therefore, as the researcher, I was included in the study as a participant. In conducting a heuristic study as the primary researcher and participant, it was essential that I monitored my own personal biases by acknowledging my positionality and personal perspective with this topic (Ozertugrul, 2017). As the researcher and a participant in this proposed study, I acknowledged that I had to bracket personal biases, so the interviews are not led by biases and the interpretation of data was not skewed. For instance, I acknowledged that, in my opinion, my daily practice of mindfulness has positively impacted my romantic relationship. As a way of containing my biases, I relied on epoché throughout this heuristic inquiry and data analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Epoché is a state of self-awareness in which the researcher is aware of their biases and judgments with regards to the phenomenon and attempts to set them aside to avoid interference during data collection or analysis (Langdrige, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). The practice

of epoché allowed me to describe the phenomenon with the intention of setting aside my own experiences. I kept a journal for self-reflections and relied on my dissertation committee to support me in acknowledging my personal biases throughout research process.

### **Significance**

This study is an original contribution to the research literature as it fills a gap in understanding how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships. This study may lead to positive social change in various contexts. By better understanding the nuances of mindfulness and emotional-regulation in women's romantic relationships, this study enhances understanding how best to support women. For instance, the findings from the study may assist therapists working with women who become emotionally dysregulated during inevitable times of relational stress resulting in emotional disconnection, lack of intimacy, separation, and/or divorce (Weinberger, Hofstein, & Krauss Whitbourne, 2008). The findings may also support the research on mindfulness-based couples therapy by better understanding the nuances of women's experiences. The findings of this study may also support mindfulness educators such as mindfulness meditation teachers as it could influence the way in which they present the value of practicing mindfulness in relationships. This study may spark an interest in further qualitative studies with an emphasis on how the practice of mindfulness effects women's friendships or how the practice of mindfulness effects men's romantic relationships.



This study may lead to positive social change as it centers on uncovering the nuances of mindfulness and emotional-regulation in romantic relationships. Similar to the practice of mindfulness, engagement in social change stems from personal awareness of implicit attitudes (Cunningham, Preacher, & Mahzarin, 2001), the role of emotion (Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009), and self-awareness (Hewstone et al., 2014). This study may enhance understanding of how mindfulness may lead to deeper connection and stability in romantic relationships, for women, and as a result, their partners and children. It is my hope that through the findings of this proposed study, women will be inspired and/or encouraged to develop their own practice of mindfulness.

### **Summary**

There was a gap in the literature in understanding how the practice of mindfulness affects women's romantic relationships. The conceptual framework for this study was MMT, a recently developed theory used to conceptualize how mindfulness supports wellbeing and a shift from stress to awareness with the intent of gaining a deeper understanding how meaning is made within romantic relationships, through the practice of mindfulness (Garland et al., 2015a; Garland et al., 2015b).

Mindfulness has been identified as an emotional regulation practice that has been found to support women in remaining calm in romantic relationships (McCreary & Alderson, 2013). The practice of mindfulness as an emotional regulation strategy has been found to support restful sleep, stress relief, and awareness of an individual's self and others (Cordon et al., 2009; Goodall et al., 2012; Pepping et al., 2013). Mindfulness trainings help to enhance emotional regulation (Hanley & Garland, 2014; Hanley et al.,

2014; Klatt et al., 2009; Tang & Tang, 2015; Valente & Marotta, 2005). Thus, mindfulness interventions, in addition to other interventions, can support couples in learning to tolerate, understand, and manage uncomfortable and/or volatile emotional states (Siegel, 2014).

Mindful awareness has been found to enhance the functioning within romantic relationships through the practice of remaining non-judgmental, calm, and emotionally regulated during times of struggle (Guina, 2016). McCreary and Alderson (2013) identified that mindfulness meditation has positive benefits in women's experiences of sexual intimacy in their romantic relationships. There was a need to better understand how the practice of mindfulness is experienced, subjectively, within relationships (Davis et al., 2016; Garland et al., 2017; Quaglia et al., 2015; Wachs & Cordova, 2007; Webb et al., 2013). A heuristic research method was used to understand the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1990). In Chapter 2, I will present a review of academic literature related to mindfulness and romantic relationships.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Emotional regulation, through mindfulness, empowers women to feel relaxed and stable within their romantic relationships (McCreary & Alderson, 2013). Emotional regulation has been defined as an individual's ability to regulate their nervous system and, in turn, their emotional responses through emotional acceptance and shifting away from automatic emotional reactivity (Adams et al., 2014; Gander & Buchheim, 2015; Karremans, et al., 2017; Kotsou, et al., 2018). Mindfulness has been defined as present moment experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Shapiro, 2009) and found to enhance emotional regulation through relaxing an individual's nervous system and in turn, supporting restful sleep, stress release, and an enhanced sense of awareness for oneself and others (Cordon et al., 2009; Goodall et al., 2012; Pepping et al., 2013). People tend to report feeling emotionally regulated and connected to themselves and others in the present moment (Klatt et al., 2009; Valente & Marotta, 2005). In one study, for example, mindfulness practitioners were found to experience a greater sense of well-being and mindfulness in daily activities, than those who did not have a practice of mindfulness (Hanley et al., 2014). Though there is a great deal of research on the value of mindfulness, there was a gap in the literature regarding how mindfulness impacts women's romantic relationships.

To address this gap, the purpose of this heuristic study was to understand how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships. For this study, romantic relationships referred to marriage or committed life partnership. There was a need for

increased understanding of the experience of mindfulness in relationships. Based on my preliminary review of the literature, there had been one qualitative study on mindfulness related to women's romantic relationships (McCreary & Alderson, 2013). In that study, the authors explored how women's practice of mindfulness meditation impacted their experience of sexual intimacy. In contrast, my study focused on how women's practice of mindfulness meditation effects their experience in romantic relationships, focusing primarily on emotional intimacy.

Numerous quantitative studies have confirmed that the practice of mindfulness, present-moment awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), is a strategy used to obtain and maintain emotional regulation (Davis et al., 2016; Karremans et al., 2017; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Pepping et al., 2013). Mindfulness in romantic relationships was related to heightened relational connection and emotional regulation (Cordon et al., 2009; Goodall et al., 2012), perceived partner support (Williams & Cano, 2014), emotional security (Hertz et al., 2012; Siegel, 2014), enhanced attention and self-awareness (Tang & Tang, 2015), as well as enhanced sexual intimacy (McCreary & Alderson, 2013). This conceptual framework for this study was mindfulness-to-meaning theory (Garland et al., 2015a; Garland et al., 2015b) and an in-depth review of the recent literature on mindfulness in romantic relationships. The intention of this study was to help fill the gap within the literature related to understanding how women perceive and describe how their practice of mindfulness effects their romantic relationships.

In this chapter, I will begin by describing the literature search strategy. Next, the conceptual framework, mindfulness-to-meaning theory, is described in detail

followed by the literature review of key concepts. Finally, I will provide a summary of the literature.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I performed a comprehensive literature search using Thoreau, within the Walden University library. Each search was narrowed to include recently published, peer-reviewed articles, as well as original foundational works on mindfulness-to-meaning theory. I obtained literature from various databases included in the Walden University library. The databases included: MEDLINE, Business Source Complete, Social Sciences Citation Index, PsychINFO, PsycARTICLES, SAGE Full Text Collection, ERIC, MEDLINE, Journals@OVID, Academic Search Complete, Education Source, Science Direct, Nursing & Allied Health Database, Expanded Academic ASAP, Arts & Humanities Citation Index, and Google Scholar.

Phrases and Keywords used in my literature search included: *mindfulness-to-meaning theory, mindfulness, mindfulness AND relationships, mindfulness AND romantic relationships, mindfulness AND marriage, mindfulness AND emotional regulation, women AND emotional regulation, mindfulness AND women, and mindfulness AND adult attachment*. Additional literature was obtained through published books and revisiting the Walden library databases for relevant references that were cited in the articles and other works found initially. This thorough literature review was completed to build a foundation for this heuristic study exploring how women perceive and describe the practice of mindfulness and the effect on their romantic relationships.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Mindfulness-to-Meaning Theory**

The conceptual framework for this study was MMT (Garland et al., 2015a). MMT had yet to be applied in a qualitative study, as the conceptual framework, as MMT was created with the intention of describing how mindfulness supports wellbeing and the shift from a state of stress into a state of awareness. MMT theorists posit that this awareness leads to positive affective process and a deep sense of meaning (Garland et al., 2015a). MMT was created to provide a clear model that merges concepts from affective, cognitive, cognitive-behavioral, neuroscientific, clinical science, and Buddhist perspectives (Carlson, 2015) and it addresses the importance of self-awareness through an individual's experience in relationship with self and others (Garland et al., 2015a).

Essential to this proposed research study, MMT was used to describe that wellbeing and emotional regulation are improved through two components of mindfulness: positive reappraisal and savoring (Garland et al., 2015b). MMT was created based on the notion that reappraisal leads to savoring positive lived experiences (Garland et al., 2015b). Garland et al., (2015a) defined reappraisal as a form of self-evaluation of cognitive-affective processing to enhance wellbeing. Savoring was defined as a self-reflective process aimed at noticing the pleasurable features and positive emotions connected to various experiences (Garland et al., 2015a). Notably, future savoring is supported by past adversity (Croft, Dunn, & Quoidback 2014).

The practice of mindfulness supports both cognitive-affective and neurobiological experiences within a meditative experience (Tang, Holzel, & Posner, 2015). Garland et

al. (2015a) identified a gap within mindfulness-based theories that asserts mindfulness is the opposite to reappraisal which is focused on nonjudgmental awareness. Alternatively, MMT is used as a way of inviting people to reappraisal and savor positive aspects of their experiences. Garland et al. argued non-evaluative, radical acceptance, and nonjudgment are a narrow aspect of the practice of mindfulness and therefore, suggested a MMT as a means of better describing the therapeutic aspects of mindfulness in Western society. These authors identified a need for better understanding how mindfulness practitioners shift their experiences from their meditative practice into their day-to-day life experiences and relationships through language and personal narratives. Garland et al. were interested in understanding how mindfulness impacts an individual's cognitive appraisals of themselves and others and the meaning one makes about various lived experiences. These authors believed that positive reappraisal is supported through the practice of mindfulness meditation and leads individuals to experience eudaimonic wellbeing. Eudaimonic wellbeing is an individual's authentic true nature, purpose, and meaning in life (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Ryff, 2017). Positive reappraisal is a psychological process used to reconstruct stressful events as meaningful or growth-promoting (Garland et al., 2015a).

**Positive reappraisal.** Positive reappraisal has been defined as central to contemporary theories of emotional regulation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Reappraisal has been found to support an individual's ability to transform affective experience (Mauss, Cook, Cheng, & Gross). Garland et al (2015a) identified positive reappraisal as a natural component in the practice of mindfulness in that appraising both positive and

aversive lived experiences are necessary for components of growth and transformation.

Tedeschi and Blevins (2015) considered positive reappraisal similar to reflective rumination when compared to intrusive, automatic rumination which they considered unpredictable, unhelpful, and linked to anxiety and depression.

The practice of mindfulness interrupts automatic conditioned reactions by introducing a decentering buffer through conscious reflection (Garland et al., 2015a). Garland et al. (2015a) posited that the practice of mindfulness promotes reappraisal of the meanings associated with negative lived experiences which was found to enhance resilience. Decentering can restore balance between physical and intangible experiences by increasing context (Garland et al., 2015a), support meaning making in the face of distress through nonthreatening reflection (Kross & Ayduk, 2011). Kross and Ayduk (2011) noted that reflection has been found to enhance cognitive flexibility and insight by shifting from content-focus to consciousness. A consistent mindfulness practice supported the development of trait mindfulness (Garland et al., 2010). Trait mindfulness improves an individual's ability engage in positive reappraisals when faced with adversity (Garland et al., 2015b).

Mindfulness has been defined as the practice of calming the mind, stabilizing attention, and a step towards gaining personal insights into the nature of oneself and lived experiences (Bodhi, 2011). Buddhist meditation is used to experience clear comprehension and intense self-study as a way of alleviating self-inflicted suffering by noticing and honoring difficult states of experience while deliberately focusing on positive mental states, versus neutral states, as a means of leading to a deepening sense of



eudaimonic wellbeing. Thus, mindful acceptance of all lived experiences naturally decreases rumination (Garland et al., 2015a; Garland et al., 2015b).

MMT was designed with the intention of furthering mindfulness-based research with an emphasis on understanding how metacognitive awareness of an individual's cognitive-affective experience lead to a more adaptive appraisal. MMT includes two hypotheses: (a) the mindfulness reappraisal hypothesis which posits that mindfulness produces meaning through reappraisal, and (b) the mindfulness savoring hypothesis which posits that mindfulness produces meaning through savoring (Garland et al., 2015b). Carlson (2015) asserted that MMT can be used to support future research aimed at understanding how the practice of mindfulness promotes eudaimonic wellbeing and therefore, also supports researchers in studying the processes that are commonly observed within therapeutic settings. Last, Garland et al. (2015b) noted that they hoped MMT will further research by better understanding how the practice of mindfulness enables people in adapt and flourish in daily life. Garland et al. (2017) used self-reports to gather data from a community sample of 234 people engaged in a mindfulness-based intervention. They confirmed the MMT hypothesis that mindfulness produces eudaimonic wellbeing by promoting positive reappraisal. They also found that mindfulness and reappraisal are interconnected and reinforced through a consistent meditation practice. Garland et al. (2015a) also noted that, paradoxically, by adopting a nonevaluative state of mind, an individual can make positive re-evaluations of life-experiences which supports change through acceptance. Since MMT is a new framework, there was a need for more research.

## **Literature Review**

This section is dedicated to review and synthesis of relevant articles and studies related to mindfulness in romantic relationships. I will present a comprehensive review of the current literature on mindfulness in relationships, beginning with the description of the practice of mindfulness with an emphasis on mindfulness meditation, mindlessness, emotional regulation, and emotional dysregulation. I will then review recent research related to mindfulness in romantic relationships, specifically related to mindfulness training interventions and relationship wellbeing. In the review of the literature I will indicate those studies that are qualitative or specifically focused on women. All other studies presented were conducted through quantitative research with couples.

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness can be described as a supportive way of noticing subtle distinctions while also staying present in the moment (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Such distinctions can pronounce an individual's sensitivity to their environment, enhance open-mindedness and problem-solving strategies, while also introducing new ways of perceiving experiences. Simply put, mindfulness is the present moment experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Shapiro, 2009).

Mindfulness originated within the Buddhist tradition and over the years has become more recognized within Western culture based on the benefits associated with the practice of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). With this in mind, it is important to conceptualize mindfulness as the practice of openness, curiosity (Wachs & Cordova, 2007), discernment, retention, and connected to present moment awareness

without judgment (Shapiro, 2009). Bishop et al. (2004) proposed a two-component model: a) self-regulation of attention to present moment experiences and events, and b) attending to the present by remaining curious, open, and accepting. By attending to here-and-now, individuals are more present and alive through the regulation of their attention in the moment. Instead of ruminating or elaborating about personal experiences, mindfulness invites individuals to notice direct experiences in the body and mind (Bishop et al., 2004). The practice of mindfulness is an individual's ability to welcome and accept any thoughts that arise within the mind, both positive and negative, with the intention of observing the thoughts while maintaining attention on breath. With a beginner's mind, the practice of mindfulness invites us to view our experiences without our conditioned assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and desires. By maintaining a curiosity within the present moment, when the mind wanders, the observer can witness, notice, and acknowledge thoughts, feelings, and sensations and then return to their breath awareness (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Through the practice of mindfulness, individuals refrain from repressing thoughts, feelings, and sensations by engaging in acceptance and curiosity as a way of supporting emotional tolerance during momentary distress. Also, dispositional mindfulness, which refers to an individual's natural ability to practice mindfulness in everyday life, without specific mindfulness training, influences the quality of relational connection and emotional regulation (Goodall et al., 2012). Dispositional mindfulness was associated with perceived partner support by individuals (Williams & Cano, 2014). These authors identified awareness as the primary mindfulness trait that led to such perceptions.

**Mindfulness meditation.** Mindfulness is a practice typically supported by meditation with the intention of focusing attention on breath, an object, external or internal sensations, thoughts, or feelings (Karremans et al., 2017). Notably, when the meditator's attention shifts away, they use non-judgment as a means of coming back to focusing their attention (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Within the context of relationships mindfulness is practiced by focusing an individual's attention on their thoughts and feelings as they impact their relationships, directly or indirectly (Karremans et al., 2017). Karremans et al. (2017) explained that by remaining open to observing body sensation, thoughts, and feelings, an individual can support connection between partners. By remembering to be mindful, an individual can stay present and refrain from ruminating on stories, hurts, and difficulties of the day. The practice of mindfulness enables individuals to observe thoughts and emotions as they arise and fade away (Karremans et al., 2017). Heightened mindfulness was found to be correlated with decreased anxiety, stress, and depression (Davis et al., 2016). By remaining mindful, an individual remains aware to experiences, as they arise. These authors identified a need to better understand the link between mindfulness and romantic relationship as they identified both have been studied in isolation of each other.

**Mindlessness.** Mindlessness is defined as the opposite to mindfulness in that there is a lack of awareness in the present moment which can result in boredom, miscommunication, and relational misunderstanding (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Mindlessness can also lead to feeling reactive to experiences without awareness of the cause or experience (Karremans et al., 2017). It is human nature to shift away from

mindfulness and into mindlessness. By noticing distraction and shifting attention back into present moment awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), mindfulness can overcome mindlessness and support emotional regulation with social and affective benefits, which are not always supported with other emotional regulation strategies (Quaglia et al., 2015).

**Emotional regulation.** Emotional regulation, an individual's capacity to regulate their nervous system and emotional responses (Adams et al., 2014; Gander & Buchheim, 2015; Kotsou et al., 2018), has been associated with feeling calm, relaxed, safe, and emotionally connected in relationships (Hertz et al., 2012). Mindfulness has been found to support emotional regulation and decrease emotional reactivity within romantic relationships (Siegel, 2014). Since romantic partners are intimately connected, anger can feel contagious at times, and through the practice mindfulness, partners can soothe and return to emotional balance with each other as well (Hertz et al., 2012; Siegel, 2014; Wachs & Cordova, 2007; Webb et al., 2013). Additionally, it was found that mindfulness can help to decrease conflict between romantic partners by regulating emotional reaction, which led to quicker stress recovery (Laurent, Hertz, Nelson, & Laurent, 2016). Laurent et al. (2016) found that partners who practiced acceptance and openness in the face of conflict were better able to maintain equanimity and refrain from attempting to control, fix, or infer their own judgments on their partners. Mindfulness meditation was found to improve emotional regulation, enhance attention and self-awareness (Tang & Tang, 2015). Mindfulness led to greater open-mindedness, equanimity, and compassion for self and others (Tang & Tang, 2015).

**Emotional dysregulation.** When individuals experience distress and insecurity within their romantic relationship, it has been correlated to an activated nervous system resulting in dysregulated emotion, a racing heart rate, heightened stress, and insomnia (Adams et al., 2014; Gander & Buchheim, 2015). An activated nervous system negatively impacts an individual's ability to remain mindful and the quality of relational connection. Emotional dysregulation has been associated with feelings of fear, anxiety, pain, neglect, and emotional hurt (Goodall et al., 2012). When emotionally dysregulated, people are less able to tolerate stress in relationships which can result in perceived or actual loneliness, isolation, and rejection (Guina, 2016). Alternatively, anxiety in relationships was linked to low mindfulness, which was mediated by difficulties in emotional regulation, connection, as well as increased depression and relationship anxiety (Pepping et al., 2013; Pickard, Caputi, & Grenyer, 2016). Thus, emotional regulation facilitated the connection between mindfulness and relationship intimacy (Pepping et al., 2013).

Mindfulness may enable partners to maintain physiological engagement during difficult discussions and times of conflict. Thus, mindfulness helps to foster wellbeing in spite of everyday stress within romantic relationships (Laurent et al., 2016). With the use of self-report measures and online assessments, it was found that emotional discrimination and mindfulness-related differences predict daily affective experience between partners in romantic relationships (Quaglia et al., 2015). Notably, Quaglia et al. (2015) identified that future research could focus on interactions between romantic partners to gain a better sense of the subjective experience of mindfulness.

### **Mindfulness in Romantic Relationships**

A phenomenological study investigating the impact of mindfulness meditation on sexual intimacy determined that women described meditation as supportive of enhanced daily harmony, enhanced sexual life, deepened sense of love, as well as indirect benefits to the relationship and challenges (McCreary & Alderson, 2013). Each of the 10 participants identified sexuality, meditation, and spirituality as interconnected. McCreary and Alderson (2013) found that mindfulness was a strong indicator of marital satisfaction because of the partners' ability to adapt to change, consider alternate point of view, and remain open to growth and change both individually and as a couple. Beckerman and Sarracco (2011) reviewed previous empirical research on mindfulness in couples' therapy and identified that with regards to demographics, mindfulness was found to be a factor related to marital satisfaction for married couples who are over the age of 40, married for more than eight years, who have children and/or pets, and no older siblings. The practice of mindfulness was found to enable couples to better understand their relationship needs by noticing how they arise through thought, feelings, and sensations (Beckerman & Sarracco, 2011). In their qualitative study, Pruitt and McCollum (2010) found participants with an advanced mindfulness meditation practice were less reactive within their relationships, and reported more freedom and safety, interpersonally. The participants identified that meditation supported emotions and body awareness as well as compassion and acceptance of self and each other.

**Mindfulness training interventions.** Mindfulness meditation training was correlated with well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and positive psychological outcomes

(Keng, Smoski, & Robins 2011). Through quantitative studies, participants of mindfulness-based programs reported mindfulness led to positive effects even after the completion of the program or study (Hanley & Garland, 2014; Hanley et al., 2014; Klatt et al., 2009; Valente & Marotta, 2005). Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990; 1994) created mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) to provide systematic, practical instructions to help bring an individual's attention to their experience in the moment. The mindfulness-based relationship enhancement (MBRE) was adapted from the MBSR program, for couples interested in improving their relationship quality through mindfulness (Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2004). When compared to the control group, couples who completed the MBRE described heightened relationship satisfaction, independence, acceptance of one another, with less personal and relational distress (Carson et al., 2004). Notably, these results were sustained after 3-months. Mindful yoga was also identified as a primary variable responsible for the positive results (Carson et al., 2004).

Mindfulness training may support people in feeling securely connected in their relationships (Davis et al., 2016). Davis et al. (2016) also noted that when partners learn mindfulness techniques, it can support their own emotional and psychological needs. Context, change processes, and changes in relationships were identified as three dimensions of relating mindfully following participation in the mindfulness-based cognitive therapy intervention (Bihari & Mullan, 2014). Bihari and Mullan (2014) identified changes in relationships were experienced through a shift from an automatic *doing* to *being* present. Participants described being present as an opportunity to take on



an innovative approach in difficult relationships, leading to less distress and more constructive communication. They also identified that the relating mindfully construct signified a parallel process of interpersonal and intrapersonal change. Specifically, by relating mindfully to experience, it led to more supportive interpersonal connection within relationships.

Previous mindfulness-based research had centered around mindfulness-based interventions like mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (M-BCT) (Williams, Russel, & Russel, 2008), mindfulness-based relapse prevention (MBRP) (Bowen et al., 2009), and mindfulness-oriented recovery enhancement (MORE) (Garland & Howard, 2013; Garland et al., 2014). Each of these interventions have operationalized the practice of mindfulness as an opportunity to practice nonjudgment through focused attention on lived experiences in the present moment which has been found to promote eudaimonic wellbeing, our authentic true nature (Garland et al., 2015a). Repetitive mindfulness practice in attending to breath was found to strengthen an individual's ability to sustain sensory attention (Farb, Segal, & Anderson, 2013). Farb et al. (2013) found that sustained attention helped decrease mind wandering while also increasing attention control. Mindfulness has been identified as an emotional regulation strategy which enables an individual to notice maladaptive patterns of experience interpretation and patterns of response (Gander & Buchheim, 2015). That said, reducing fixation on difficult life events does not naturally enhance eudaimonic wellbeing (Garland et al., 2015a).

Following a mindfulness-based relationship enhancement intervention for happy couples, the results indicated that the consistent practice of mindfulness enhanced individual well-being and relationship functioning (Carson et al., 2004). This randomized controlled trial helped the authors determine that by adopting a mindful approach couples were better able to handle stress by remaining relaxed and consistent and accepting of one another. Interestingly, in a follow-up study, couples reported exciting and self-expanding activities as the primary mediator of mindfulness-related improvements, when compared to relaxation (Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2007).

Meditative dialogue was developed as couples-based interventions focused on cultivating empathy and compassion individually and towards each other (Lord, 2017). Lord (2017) presented a case study to demonstrate how the meditative dialogue practice was used in therapy to support a couple in deepening their relationship themselves and one another. Also, the practice of mindfulness was found to develop a healthy sense of self and others through non-judgment, acceptance, remaining present, open, and empathic, and calm, while letting go of difficulty.

**Relationship wellbeing.** Romantic relationships have been described as interdependent since partner responses influence each other's responses (Karremans et al., 2017). Well-being, happiness, and health are supported by the quality of close romantic relationships (Pietromonaco, Uchino, & Dunkel Schetter, 2013). Mindfulness has been connected to positive relationship satisfaction and adjustment (Khaddouma, Coop Gordon, & Bolden, 2015). Acceptance and awareness are two facets of mindfulness. The acceptance of an individual's internal experiences along with the

awareness of one another were associated with relationship satisfaction (Krafft, Haeger, & Levin, 2017). Mindfulness was found to be positively correlated to satisfaction in romantic relationships and dispositional mindfulness reduced the stress response between partners (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007). Partners who are more mindful were more likely to enter into a stressful conversation more calmly with less anxiety or hostility and reported feeling satisfied within their relationship (Barnes et al., 2017).

An individual's willingness to forgiveness was found to mediate mindfulness and psychological well-being within close relationships (Webb et al., 2013). Mindfulness was associated with forgiveness of self, others, and health-related situations (Webb et al., 2013). Mindfulness is the primary factor associated with forgiveness towards others and secondarily with regards to forgiveness of self and situations (Webb et al., 2013). Mindful partners are able to remain present, see each other clearly, with less judgment, and respond in appropriate and supportive ways (Wachs & Cordova, 2007).

Mindfulness is associated with marital adjustment (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Emotional skills, including the ability to communicate clearly, foster emotional repertoires, and regulate anger were found to link mindfulness and the quality of marriage. Mindfulness enables couples to be receptive and open in the present while promoting acceptance and healthy communication and responding (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). By enhancing distress tolerance, partners tend to respond with empathy and compassion, linked to relational health and decreased reactivity to anger (Beckerman & Sarracco, 2011; Hertz et al., 2012; Siegel, 2014; Webb et al., 2013). There was an

identified need for more research in the area of mindfulness in romantic relationships, specifically related to integrating mindfulness into couples' therapy (Atkinson, 2013; Beckerman & Sarracco, 2011), a deeper understanding of mindfulness within romantic relationships (Karremans et al., 2017), and more insights into how mindfulness supports positive connection in romantic relationships (Kozlowski, 2013).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

There was a gap in the literature with regards to understanding how women perceive and describe how their practice of mindfulness effects their romantic relationships. The conceptual framework for this study was MMT, a recently developed theory used to conceptualize how mindfulness supports wellbeing and a shift from stress to awareness with the intent of gaining a deeper understanding how meaning is made within romantic relationships, through the practice of mindfulness (Garland et al., 2015a; Garland et al., 2015b). The purpose of this heuristic study was to understand how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships.

Mindfulness has been identified as an emotional regulation practice that has been found to support women in remaining calm in romantic relationships (McCreary & Alderson, 2013). The practice of mindfulness as an emotional regulation strategy has been found to support restful sleep, stress relief, and awareness of self and others (Cordon et al., 2009; Goodall et al., 2012; Pepping et al., 2013). Mindfulness trainings help to enhance emotional regulation (Hanley & Garland, 2014; Hanley et al., 2014; Klatt et al., 2009; Tang & Tang, 2015; Valente & Marotta, 2005; Hanley et al., 2014). Thus, mindfulness interventions, in addition to other interventions, can support couples in

learning to tolerate, understand, and manage uncomfortable and/or volatile emotional states (Siegel, 2014).

Mindful awareness has been found to enhance the functioning within romantic relationships through the practice of remaining non-judgmental, calm, and emotionally regulated during times of struggle (Guina, 2016). McCreary and Alderson (2013) identified that mindfulness meditation has positive benefits in women's experiences of sexual intimacy in their romantic relationships. There was a need to better understand how the practice of mindfulness is experienced, subjectively, within relationships (Davis et al., 2016; Garland et al., 2017; Quaglia et al., 2015; Wachs & Cordova, 2007; Webb et al., 2013). This qualitative study helps to fill the gap in the literature on understanding how mindfulness is experienced in women's romantic relationships. In Chapter 3, I will explain the research design and methods which were used in this study.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### Introduction

The purpose of this heuristic study was to understand how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships. For this study, romantic relationships referred to marriage or committed life partnership. Based on a thorough literature review, there was a gap in understanding the experience of mindfulness in romantic relationships (Davis et al., 2016; Garland et al., 2017; Quaglia et al., 2015; Wachs & Cordova, 2007; Webb et al., 2013).

In this chapter, I will describe and review the chosen research design for this study and the rationale behind that choice. The role of the researcher, procedures used for participant recruitment, plan for data collection and analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures will also be discussed in this chapter. Last, a summary will be provided at the end of the chapter.

### Research Design and Rationale

This study was guided by one research question: how do women perceive and describe the effect of mindfulness practice on their romantic relationships? Based on this question, the phenomenon under study was to understand the lived experiences of women in a romantic relationship who regularly practice mindfulness. The nature of this study was a qualitative approach using Moustakas's (1990) heuristic method. Moustakas created this research method as a basis for understanding deep human experience. The research question guided the exploration of personal meaning through understanding the lived experiences of each *co-researcher*, the term used for participants in heuristic studies

(Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic studies explore personal meaning through understanding the lived experiences of the participants. By understanding individual perspectives, it led to discovering and clarifying emerging themes related to women's personal practice of mindfulness in relation to their romantic relationships. Moustakas's (1990) phases of heuristic inquiry were used as a guide to ensure full appreciation for each co-researcher's lived experience.

Based on the preliminary review of literature, I determined that further qualitative research was needed in order to better understand the subjective experience of mindfulness in relation to women's romantic relationships. The information on this topic led to insights into the benefits of remaining emotionally regulated during times of relational stress. As Moustakas (1990) noted, heuristics moves away from quantifying experience to instead extend the search into the phenomenon of human experience. Heuristic studies explore personal meaning through understanding the lived experiences of the participants. With this study, I sought to understand women's perspectives as a way of discovering and clarifying emerging themes related to women's personal practice of mindfulness in relation to their romantic relationships.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Within a heuristic study, it is important that I have direct experience with the phenomenon being studied, as my experience was included as data along with the co-researchers (Moustakas, 1990). Overall, the main role of the researcher, in any qualitative study, is to be the primary instrument through which data is gathered, analyzed, and interpreted (Creswell, 2013). By using a heuristic method, my role as a researcher was to

incorporate my own experiences along with the experiences of the co-researchers. When interviewing, I aimed to ensure each co-researcher felt honored as she shared her story with the intention of better understanding the investigated phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As outlined by Moustakas's heuristic procedure for the collection and interpretation, I was responsible for: (a) having a personal connection with the phenomenon, (b) immersing myself in the research question, (c) locating and selecting co-researchers, (d) collecting quality information from co-researchers through observations, interviews, and any additional data sources provided, (e) audio-recording each interview and having them transcribed using an application called Rev Recorder, with a signed non-disclosure agreement for transcription services, (f) uncovering emerging themes through coding the data, and (g) interpreting and reporting the findings (Moustakas, 1990).

As a psychologist, university instructor, and mindfulness/yoga teacher, I ensured that I had no previous working alliance with co-researchers prior to meeting face-to-face for the interviews. This helped to ensure that I did not hold bias or a position of authority or power over the co-researchers. I also addressed this when reviewing informed consent with each woman. Co-researchers were recruited through word of mouth and by posting a recruitment poster on Alberta-based mindfulness Facebook groups, as well as on community announcement boards at wellness centers. Also, during the recruitment phase, I addressed additional ethical issues including: the purpose and nature of the study, confidentiality, potential risks of participation in the study, the interview and data collection process, how data is securely maintained, and informed consent. As the



primary research of this proposed heuristic study, I was mindful of my biases by recognizing my positionality and viewpoint as it related to this topic (Ozertugrul, 2017).

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

Ten women who were currently living in Alberta, Canada, in a committed relationship, with a mindfulness meditation practice for at least 6 months were selected to take part in this research study. In a heuristic study, as the researcher, I also met the criteria of a participant and included my experience with the phenomena and this informed the participant selection. Also, I decided to narrow this inquiry to women because I cannot personally speak to the experiences of men, as men were found to experience relationships in a different way than women (Monteoliva et al., 2012). The women who were included in the study were taken at their word when they identified that they met the criteria as they were currently living in Alberta, Canada, in a committed relationship, with a current mindfulness meditation practice for at least 6 months.

Qualitative research tends to require smaller sample sizes than quantitative studies, typically include five or more participants (Emmel, 2013). By understanding individual perspectives, this study sought to discover and clarify emerging themes related to women's personal practice of mindfulness in relation to their romantic relationships. The intention was to include 10-12 co-researchers. If necessary, I had planned to recruit more co-researchers to reach saturation. The sample size must support the researcher in exploring the phenomenon to saturation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Saturation

is achieved when no new themes emerge from the data and when redundancy in the themes has been identified (Emmel, 2013).

### **Instrumentation**

For the purpose of this study, I relied on two instruments: a brief demographic form (see Appendix A) and a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). The primary source of data collection was face-to-face semi-structured interviewed with the selected co-researchers. I created the demographic form as well as the semi-structured interview protocol which included guiding interview questions, based on the research question. Each interview question was open-ended to ensure each co-researcher felt supported and guided in fully describing their lived experiences, perceptions, and experiences related to the phenomenon. Throughout each interview, I prompted for further information to encourage each co-researcher to expand and clarify their responses.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Recruitment procedures commenced once I had received approval of the study by Walden University's IRB (IRB approval #: 07-25-18-0445390). Co-researchers were recruited using a purposeful sampling strategy, the term used to describe the process in which research participants are selected based meeting participant criteria (Bungay, Oliffe, & Atchison, 2016). In this study, purposeful sampling strategy was used to ensure co-researchers aligned with the specific criteria that they were currently living in Alberta, Canada, in a committed relationship, with a current mindfulness meditation practice for at least 6 months. I had spoken with local wellness centers and was granted permission to

hang my recruitment posters at their venues. I also posted my recruitment poster on local community-based Facebook groups created to support mindfulness practice.

When a woman contacted me to express her interest in voluntary participation, I emailed her to confirm that she met the criteria, using the demographic form, described the study in further detail, discussed a date and time for the interview, and then emailed a consent form for her review to be discussed and signed when we met for one semi-structured interview. If recruitment had resulted in too few participants, I had planned to use snowball sampling by inviting co-researchers to provide my contact information to others they knew who might have been interested in participating in the study. Snowball sampling is the term used to describe the process in which research participants invite others to consider participating in the study (Kandola, Banner, O'Keefe-McCarthy, & Jassal, 2014). Once 10 co-researchers were identified, I arranged to facilitate each face-to-face interview in a mutually agreed upon location that ensured privacy, confidentiality, and no distraction.

I began each interview by reviewing the informed consent form, discussing each co-researcher's right to withdraw anytime as a voluntary participant in this study, and provided them with my contact information. Each participant signed two consent forms, one for me and one to keep a copy for her own reference. I conducted each interview, following the interview protocol. Prior to each interview, I invited participants to provide any additional data they would like to support their reflections (i.e., journal entries, personal reflection, narratives, dialogs, stories, poems, or and/or other means of expression) (see Moustakas, 1990). Each face-to-face interview was approximately 60 to

90 minutes long and recorded using my password protected audio-recording application, Rev Recorder. Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed, and an individual depiction was sent to each participant for member checking. A thank you letter was emailed to each co-researcher once she has verified the interview depiction for accuracy.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The study was guided by Moustakas's (1990) phases of heuristic inquiry: immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis of my own experience as well as each co-researcher until validation of the heuristic inquiry was achieved. There are eight steps to the data analysis procedure in heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). First, data was collected from each participant through the interview recording, the verbatim transcription from the interview, and any additional information provided by the co-researcher. Second, I immersed myself into the data until each co-researcher's experience was fully understood. The third step involved setting the data aside before returning to the data with a fresh review to take notes. By identifying qualities and themes revealed through the data of each co-researcher's experience I constructed a description of each co-researcher's experience. The fourth step required me to return to the data of the co-researcher to ensure the description honored the quality and themes related to the data from which it originated. Each individual depiction was shared with the co-researcher, for member checking. The fifth step involved completing the previous steps for each co-researcher, developing a depiction for each co-researcher's experience. The sixth step required me to create a composite description that represented the common qualities and themes of the co-researchers. For the seventh step, I returned to

the original data and individual depictions to select two or three co-researchers who exemplified the group. Individual portraits were developed for these co-researchers. As a final step, I developed a creative synthesis of women's experiences of mindfulness in romantic relationships. The final step is used as a way of prompting the researcher to provide a creative synthesis as a way of honoring the immersion, illumination, and explication of the phenomenon in study (Moustakas, 1990).

There were no discrepant cases. Had there been, they would have been included to minimize researcher biases (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Discrepant cases can also provide differing perspectives and perceptions of the phenomenon. This ensured a thorough depiction of women's experiences of mindfulness in romantic relationships is captured.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

Moustakas's (1990) identified that through heuristic inquiry, the investigation is considered credible and valid when meaning and essence is derived from an individual's unique point of view. For this proposed study, I trusted that each participant meets the specified criteria. I assumed each participant provided authentic and accurate information during the face-to-face interviews and if/when participants provide additional data. I addressed credibility (i.e., internal validity) by strictly adhering to Moustakas's phases of heuristic inquiry. Also, for data triangulation, I invited each participant to provide additional data to support their reflections (i.e., journal entries, personal reflection,

narratives, dialogs, stories, poems, or and/or other means of expression). I also conducted a member check by sharing each individual depiction with the co-researcher.

### **Transferability**

Transferability (i.e., external validity) is described as the degree to which the findings can be related to other settings (Twycross & Shields, 2005). As in all qualitative research, transferability was not the aim as the findings from this heuristic research study were not meant to be generalized since it is focused on rich personal analysis and self-reflection (Grey, 2009). As a result of this method, thick detailed description of lived experiences can enable readers to decide if the people and events may apply elsewhere (Twycross & Shields, 2005).

### **Dependability**

Dependability in qualitative research is described as reliability (Langdrige, 2007). To confirm dependability, I followed Walden University's research guidelines and quality standards and by following my interview protocol for this study. I took note of any deviations or adjustments made to the plan throughout the study process. Lastly, I communicated with my dissertation committee for guidance and support, specifically with regards to ethics and issues of trustworthiness.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is described as objectivity, in qualitative research (Langdrige, 2007). The term reflexivity is used to emphasize the importance of maintaining my personal awareness of my biases within the research process (Barry, Britten, Barber, Bradley, & Stevenson, 1999). Through reflexivity, I maintained an attitude of systematic

attention by monitoring personal biases by acknowledging my positionality, personal perspective and background with regards to this topic (Malterud, 2001). As a way of containing my biases, I relied on epoché throughout this heuristic inquiry and data analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Epoché is a state of self-awareness in which the researcher is aware of their biases and judgments with regards to the phenomenon and attempts to set them aside to avoid interference during data collection or analysis (Langdrige, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). The practice of epoché allowed me to describe the phenomenon with the intention of setting aside my own experiences. I kept a journal for self-reflections and relied on my dissertation committee to support me in acknowledging my personal biases throughout research process.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Once IRB approval was obtained from Walden University, I began recruiting participants for data collection. As a Canadian citizen, it was essential that in addition to adhering to Walden University's ethical standards, I also adhered to the research ethical considerations outlined in the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) Code of Ethics. Once approved, I recruited participants using word of mouth and by posting a recruitment invitation on Alberta-based mindfulness-based wellness Facebook groups as well as on community announcement boards at wellness centers. When women express interest to participate in the proposed study, I emailed her with additional information related to the purpose of the study, my intention to include 10-12 co-researchers, the interview process, and the option to withdraw at any time. If a participant had withdrawn

from the study following their interview, I would have deleted and destroyed all information related to her. No co-researchers withdrew. My intention was to provide each potential co-researcher with the information necessary to make an informed decision about her voluntary participation in the study. I ensured that I had no previous working alliance with any of the co-researchers. This helped to ensure I did not hold bias or a position of authority or power over co-researchers. Potential participants were provided with my cell phone number as well as my Walden University email address should they have had questions related to the study or to schedule our face-to-face interview, where we also reviewed informed consent. I was the only person with access to my Walden University email and the voicemail on my cell phone.

Each face-to-face interview was audio-recorded using my password protected audio-recording/transcription application. Each co-researcher was assigned a number to identify her data and to ensure confidentiality. The data was stored on my password protected personal laptop and stored on a USB drive protected by HIPAA compliance which was kept in a locked file cabinet. I was the only person with access to this information. All materials will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed by shredding and recorded data erasure.

### **Summary**

The proposed heuristic study was guided by one research question: how do women perceive and describe the effect of mindfulness practice on their romantic relationships? The study sought to understand women's perspectives as a way of discovering and clarifying emerging themes related to women's personal practice of



mindfulness in relation to their romantic relationships. By using a heuristic method, my role as a researcher was to incorporate my own experiences along with the experiences of co-researchers and serve as a curious and open-minded witness, interviewer, investigator, data collector, and analyzer.

Participant criteria required 10-12 women who were currently living in Alberta, Canada, in a committed relationship, with a mindfulness meditation practice for at least six months. Co-researchers were sought out by word of mouth and by posting a recruitment invitation on Alberta-based mindfulness-based wellness Facebook groups as well as on community announcement boards at wellness centers. The intention was to include 10-12 co-researchers or until saturation was achieved. Through initial engagement, the research question was identified, the study was guided by Moustakas's phases of heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). Saturation was achieved when no new themes emerge from the data and when redundancy in the themes has been identified (Emmel, 2013). I relied on a brief demographic form, semi-structured interview protocol, and an audio-recording and transcription application called Rev Recorder, to ensure each interview was captured accurately.

Moustakas's (1990) eight steps for data analysis were followed. As in all qualitative research, transferability was not the aim as the findings from this heuristic research study were not meant to be generalized since it is focused on rich personal analysis and self-reflection (Grey, 2009). To confirm dependability, I followed Walden University's research guidelines and quality standards and by following my detailed plan for this study. I relied on epoché throughout this heuristic inquiry and data analysis to

ensure confirmability (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). As a Canadian student, I adhered to Walden University's ethical standards as well as the CPA Code of Ethics. To ensure confidentiality, each co-researcher was assigned a number to identify her data and all data was stored on my password protected personal laptop and stored on a HIPAA compliant USB drive and locked in a safe only I access.

There was a need to better understand how the practice of mindfulness is experienced, subjectively, within relationships (Davis et al., 2016; Garland et al., 2017; Quaglia et al., 2015; Wachs & Cordova, 2007; Webb et al., 2013). This qualitative study helped to fill the gap in the literature on understanding how mindfulness is experienced in women's romantic relationships. In Chapter 4, I will describe the setting of the study, co-research demographics, data collection procedures and data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and finally, a discussion of findings related to how women perceive and describe the practice of mindfulness and the effect it has on their romantic relationships.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this heuristic study was to understand how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships. The guiding research question was: how do women perceive and describe the effect of mindfulness practice on their romantic relationships? Based on my interviews with 10 women, the results will help to fill the literature gap in understanding the experience of mindfulness in women's romantic relationships.

In this chapter, I will describe the setting for data collection, the demographic characteristics of the co-researchers and how data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 women. I will also discuss my procedures for data analysis, along with evidence of trustworthiness. I will conclude with the results of the study and a summary of the chapter.

### **Setting**

The interviews were held in either my office or private meeting spaces and work settings chosen by the co-researchers, in a city nearby. There were no interruptions or other factors that impacted the data collection or results.

### **Demographics**

The sample of this study consisted of 10 women who met the criteria: currently living in Alberta, in a committed romantic relationship, and with a mindfulness meditation practice for at least 6 months. As women inquired about the study, I determined eligibility during our initial contact via email. I asked the women about their

demographic information, which I recorded on my demographic form. The co-researchers were between in the age range of 20 to 55 years of age, with a mindfulness meditation practice ranging between 1 to 17 years in length, and relationships ranging between 7 months to 17 years. Nine of the 10 women identified as working, in some capacity, within the wellness industry as coaches, therapists, yoga and/or meditation teachers. I will expand on each co-researcher's demographic information without including any identifiable biographical information. Also, co-researcher codes, such as P1 and P2, are used in lieu of names, to maintain confidentiality.

**P1**

P1 is in her 30s. She has been with her partner for 12 years and they live together in Alberta, Canada. She has used mindfulness meditation practice for 3 years and works in the wellness industry.

**P2**

P2 is in her 50s. She has been with her partner for 7 years. They do not currently reside together and both live in Alberta, Canada. She has used a mindfulness meditation practice for 10 years and works in the wellness industry.

**P3**

P3 is in her 30s. She has been with her partner for over 6 years and they live together in Alberta, Canada. She has used a mindfulness meditation practice for 4 years and works both in a corporate setting as well as the wellness industry.

**P4**

P4 is in her 30s. She has been with her partner for 17 years and they spilt their time living between Alberta and British Columbia, Canada. She has used a mindfulness meditation practice for over 10 years and works in the wellness industry.

**P5**

P5 is in her 20s. She has been with her partner for 3 years and they live together in Alberta, Canada. She has used a mindfulness meditation practice for 1 year and works in the wellness industry.

**P6**

P6 is in her 30s. She has been with her partner for a year and a half and currently they live in different countries. She lives in Alberta, Canada and shared that her partner may move to Alberta, in the next year. She has used a mindfulness meditation practice for 2 years, works in a corporate setting, and has recently begun exploring part-time work in the wellness industry.

**P7**

P7 identified as in her 30s. She has been with her partner for 7 years and they live together in Alberta, Canada. She has used a mindfulness meditation practice for 4 years and works in the wellness industry.

**P8**

P8 identified as in her 30s. She has been with her partner for 7 months. They do not currently reside together and both live in Alberta, Canada. She has used a mindfulness meditation practice for 4 years and works both in a corporate setting as well as the wellness industry.

**P9**

P9 identified as in her 40s. She has been with her partner for over 17 years and they live together in Alberta, Canada. She has used a mindfulness meditation practice for 17 years and works in the wellness industry.

**P10**

P10 identified as in her 30s. She has been with her partner for 6 years and they live together in Alberta, Canada. She has used a mindfulness meditation practice for 5 years and works in the wellness industry.

### **Data Collection**

Recruitment procedures commenced once I received approval of the study by Walden University's IRB. In this study, a purposeful sampling strategy was used to ensure the recruited co-researchers aligned with the specific criteria that they were currently living in Alberta, Canada, in a committed relationship, with a current mindfulness meditation practice for at least 6 months. When a woman contacted me to express her interest in voluntary participation, I emailed her to confirm that she met the criteria, using the demographic form, described the study in further detail, discussed a date and time for the interview, and then emailed a consent form for her review. Once a co-researcher was identified, she and I arranged to meet for the face-to-face interview in a mutually agreed upon location that ensured privacy, confidentiality, and no distraction. The consent form was reviewed and signed before the start of the interview.

I conducted nine face-to-face interviews with co-researchers and as required with heuristic research, I completed an interview since I was also a co-researcher. I began each interview by reviewing the informed consent form, discussing each co-researcher's right to withdraw anytime as a voluntary participant in this study, and provided them with my contact information. At no time did any participant request to withdraw from the study. Each participant signed two consent forms, one for me and one for her own records. I conducted each interview, following the interview protocol, as detailed in Chapter 3.

Prior to each interview, I invited participants to provide any additional data they would like to support their reflections (i.e., journal entries, personal reflection, narratives, dialogs, stories, poems, or and/or other means of expression) (see Moustakas, 1990). These additional data items were discussed during the individual interviews. Each face-to-face interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was recorded using my password protected audio-recording application, Rev Recorder. Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed using Rev Recorder. After each interview, I debriefed each co-researcher and none of the co-researchers reported feeling any emotional distress caused by participation in this research study. I followed up with them by sending an individual depiction for member checking, within a month of our face-to-face meeting. A thank you letter was e-mailed to each co-researcher once she had verified the individual depiction for accuracy.

### **Data Analysis**

The study was guided by Moustakas's (1990) phases of heuristic inquiry: immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. There are eight steps to the data analysis procedure in heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). As the first step, data was collected from each co-researcher through the interview recording and transcribed, verbatim, into 7 to 9 page documents, for each interview. For the second step, I then immersed myself into the data until each co-researcher's experience was fully understood. The third step involved setting the data aside before returning to review and determine the key words and phrases in each transcription. These key words and phrases

were then grouped together, into larger meaning units, and finally into six themes, revealed through the raw data. Next, I constructed an individual depiction of each co-researcher's experience. The nature of each interview enabled me to include aspects of the six themes within each individual depiction. The fourth step required me to return to the transcribed data of the co-researcher to ensure the description honored the quality and themes related to the data from which it originated. Each individual depiction was shared with the co-researcher, for member checking. The fifth step involved completing the previous steps for each co-researcher, developing a depiction for each co-researcher's experience. For the sixth step, I created a composite depiction that represented the common qualities and themes of all the co-researchers, as a group. For the seventh step, I returned to the original data and individual depictions and selected three co-researchers who exemplified the group. Individual portraits were developed for these co-researchers. In the eighth and final step, I developed a creative synthesis of women's experiences of mindfulness in romantic relationships. The final step is used as a way of honoring the immersion, illumination, and explication of the phenomenon in study (Moustakas, 1990).

In this section, I will present three individual depictions. The other seven individual depictions are included as an appendix (see Appendix C). Next, I will present the three individual portraits of co-researchers who exemplify the experience as found in this study, followed by the composite depiction. Lastly, I will present a creative synthesis which I developed based on the essence of how these women experience the effects of mindfulness meditation in their romantic relationships. There were no discrepant cases and therefore, all 10 co-researchers are represented through the composite depiction and



creative synthesis. Each section will begin with a more detailed description of the analysis process.

### **Individual Depictions**

The following three depictions are written in first person and represent the individual co-researcher's experience of mindfulness meditation in her romantic relationship. Through the creation of an individual depiction, the heuristic researcher can describe the meaning and essence of each co-researcher's experience with the phenomena (Moustakas, 1990).

**P3.** Life is just so much better when I'm meditating regularly and being mindful in my everyday life. The world goes from grey, black, and white to technicolor. Everything feels easier. I see more clearly, am more accepting, and rest better. My goals are easily envisioned and obtained. It always happens. I am more mindful of how my choices affect me and the people in my life. My practice is ever-evolving, I am being drawn to the spiritual side of myself, and my partner and I continue growing together.

My partner's openness and acceptance to everything that life has to offer and that I have to offer, helps me feel so close to him. It's the first time in my life that someone has just been so supportive of me without questioning anything. I have never felt this supported by anyone else. We meditate together, by sitting, laying in bed, holding hands, or practicing yoga with our mats facing each other. Our practice has brought us even closer and I am comfortable to ask for what I need and can sense what he needs. Whether it's love, affection, time, or attention, we are in constant connection, without being physically together a lot of the time. We love, respect, support, and check-in with each

other. Each year, I give him a book, I write in, called 'Why I Love You'. In it, I share memories, statements of how he has made me feel, and things he has done that made me feel very special and loved more than ever before. It feels important that he knows that it's not just the grand gestures that makes me love him. It's holding hands while we meditate, it's the way he hugged me, one morning, when I felt so deep in my core how much he loves me, that no one has ever made me feel like he does. He is so gentle, when we make love, and absolutely incredible that he blows my mind every time. I want him to know that it's our inside jokes, like how much I love his machine gun kisses. It's the small everyday things and all the really great things that he does that make me love him even more. I hope everyone has a connection like this.

**P4.** My mindfulness practice begins when I wake up. I go and sit in sanctuary space and ask my body what it needs. This practice weaves into everything in my life, where I meet myself just as I am, with love, kindness, and compassion. By listening to my body, the answers come and I have more clarity around how to support myself. Breathing into my heart space helps me continue to feel what's here and what's possible. Through tremendous loss, I cracked open and became receptive to life, like being birthed into a new world of spirituality and connection. It helped me understand my own heart, my own essence, and my deep connection with all that is, including nature. My relationships are better because my body's better, I am more open, more alive, and I have healed. My healing has had a profound effect on my romantic relationship.

I feel like our relationship went through a rebirthing period around that time of loss, as well. Now we practice conscious communication, exchange love, and create

space for one another to be seen and heard. We have a common language and we're both committed to learning and growing individually and then sharing with each other. Our individual mindfulness practices give us a common language which helps us to share and deeply respect each other's individual journeys. I can trust that he understands what I am saying and feeling. I feel lucky that my partner is someone who understands that my heart is tender and he has always treated me tenderly. We really love being together and learn a lot from one another. Through grief, we've emerged as strong individuals who really like and celebrate each other. I feel tremendous gratitude for our ability to connect. He's a remarkable human being who is very connected to his heart, spirit, and body. Our relationship is nourished through deep appreciation for one another, with space for continual growth. Our relationship is in the best place that it has been. It's free, alive, full, dynamic, and juicy. There's so much more to deepen into, to experience, to dance with, to hold, and to contemplate.

**P6.** Meditation was the missing piece in my spiritual practice. It has changed my life by helping me realize that I belong to something greater and am connected to everything. I am not just a drop; I am the entire ocean. Mindfulness helps me see the big picture and I am present in the moment and more tolerant, compassionate, and understanding of others. The situations haven't changed, my perception has. By being mindful, I am not distracted and feel in control of my experience because I am in-tune with myself. When I am not, I feel scattered, agitated, distracted and in my head. My mindfulness meditation practice feels like coming home. It is comforting knowing that I am safe, light, and open. My heart is open, aligned, in-tune with the universe, and

everything feels easy. It feels like a sense of belonging, relief, and peacefulness. My practice helps me feel comfortable in my body and my being, reminding me that we are all here to love and feel loved.

I am very grateful that my partner and I meditate together. It feels like we are working as a team and, when something happens between us, we don't project onto each other, instead, we stop and look at ourselves. We are in this relationship together and it feels comfortable and supportive with so much compassion and understanding because we are growing together. We bring mindfulness everywhere, so we can speak from the heart, stay present, and connected on a deeper level. We bring our mindfulness into the bedroom, as well, because sex is a sacred practice. It deepens our connection and makes us care for each other even more. We support each other in staying present which leads to feeling open and compassionate with each other. My heart is open, warm, overflowing, and I feel that he is in my heart. Through our mindfulness meditation practice, we can be open and honest in our communication because our souls know each other. With him, I feel humble, vulnerable, and, when we work through difficulty, it makes us stronger and connected because we are growing together.

### **Exemplary Portraits**

Through the creation of an exemplary portrait, the heuristic researcher can retain the co-researcher's experience of mindfulness meditation in her romantic relationship, by illustrating her lived experience. Moustakas (1990) recommended presenting three portraits, written in third person and illuminated through direct quotations as well as

demographic and autobiographical information provided during the preparation and collection of data.

**P2.** P2 is a woman in her 50s who has been with her partner for 7 years. She and her partner each have two grown children from previous relationships. They live in different communities, within Alberta, Canada, and make time to see each other on weekends. P2 shared that she came to have a mindfulness meditation practice when she took her yoga teacher training over ten years ago. Through her practice, she can notice herself become more in her body and less in her mind, which enables her to tap into moment-to-moment presence.

You become more and more in the body and less in the head. Less in your regular personality and more into what's real moment-to-moment. So those can offer some pretty big insights into what's true for you. I think when we're feeling and present in our body, we're actually more present for the person receiving the messages.

Her practice has helped her and her partner recognize their relationship patterns more clearly which allows her to feel less reactive and experience less resentment or jealousy. Her practice enables her to notice tension arising in their relationship and this noticing makes it easier to respond with calmness and kindness to both her partner and herself. She shared that her practice leaves her feeling calm and grounded.

It helps me to see within the dynamics of our relationship. Things I might not be able to speak about, that are in the past, that are bothering me. I'm aware of them sooner and I can feel what it's like to not want to address it and then when I know it's time to address it, I have the confidence to say it. I don't know if I would have [the confidence] if I didn't have a practice to ground myself in.

P2 explained that when her busy mind settles, it enables her to see and think more clearly. As she becomes aware of her breath, thoughts, and emotions, she becomes more

in-tune with her body. This, in turn, helps her to notice the dynamics of her relationship with her partner more clearly, and become aware of what bothers her.

I think the ups and downs of the romantic relationship are okay, that when there's a time of tension, it's like you see that time of tension and take steps to... give more space or to talk about it, or to do what you need for self-care in that moment... It definitely informs the day-to-day decisions of a relationship.

P2's partner meets her with empathy. She can tell him anything without fear of judgment and instead, experiences feelings of being met with support, love, and kindness. She feels like she was meant to be with her partner because they are so connected to each other and everything.

I think it's a feeling of unity, not being separate. You are just meant to come together with this person and it's like a completion. Kind of a coming home.

P2 wakes up each morning with an intentional practice of gratitude. Her gratitude practice enables her to feel appreciation for her partner and all of life's experiences. Her partner meets her with appreciation as they support each other in their interests.

I think the fact that he respects my practice, as any other interest I might have, that deepens appreciation when you respect each other's space, and support them in their pursuits.

Through their shared appreciation of one another, P2 and her partner continue growing together. She noted that this topic has come up when she has been asked if it matters that her partner does not share the same mindfulness meditation practice as her.

[Couples] can also absolutely maintain their relationship and not have the same practice as long as they respect each other's interests, whatever they are... By respecting each other's interests we are encouraging each other to grow.

P2's experience illuminates how her practice informs the day-to-day decisions she makes within her relationship. Her story is a powerful example of how her practice

supports a deeper connection to herself and her partner. It is through their connection that they continue growing as individuals, and in turn, growing as a couple.

**P9.** P9 is a woman in her 40s who has been with her partner for over 17 years and together they have two young children. She works full-time in the wellness industry. She has been meditating since she was 25 years old because she believes it makes her a better person, a better wife, and a better mom. She described herself as having always been fascinated by meditation, even as a teenager. She shared that, had she known then, what she knows now, she could have started meditating as a teenager. Her practice has helped her cultivate the ability to come into the present moment with intention and minimal time or effort. By focusing her attention, in the moment, P9 notices everything start to melt away, her energy becomes more relaxed, and she can drop into being fully present.

In the morning, when [my partner and children] see me with my tea and my gratitude journal, or they might catch me when I'm meditating... there's more quietness in our home. There's still joy, and fun, and playfulness. It's not serious quiet. But it's just, it's not so crazy.

Her practice helps her feel calmer, overall. She sees her practice as the foundation in her life that enables her to be less reactive to the people around her. Her partner is also non-reactive which leads to feeling that their relationship is reciprocal. She shares how her partner responds when she becomes overwhelmed:

He'll just say something coming from that almost-meditative-state, to bring me back down to earth. So I feel like, as a couple, yeah, you're always going to get thrown off a bit, but it's the other person's calm within the storm that brings you and the storm kind of dissipates.

Her mindfulness meditation practice helps her trust life and the process. She and her partner talk about everything which feels peaceful because they both know they will

get through it together. Their shared positive expectations enable them to tap into a shared mindfulness and awareness.

My husband's always been of a meditative mind, he's more calm because that's within his personality... he notices the way I am and instead of freaking back at me. He's just like, 'okay', and then gives me a look, and then I'm like, 'okay, I totally stepped out of line'...

P9 shared that in the face of difficulty, she and her partner stay connected. She affirms that her mindfulness meditation practice has enabled her and her partner to find comfort within each other. This has allowed them to find peace in all of life's transitions.

It's such a beautiful relationship. We've been married nearly 17 years and I just feel like we've been through massive financial hardships. We've moved across the world; we've moved across the country. We haven't been in that comfortable state most of our life. But we've been comfortable within each other. ...we just talk about it... It's just peaceful. It's just like, "Okay. We'll get through this."

P9 loves to wake up before her family to practice gratitude and stillness. When she practices gratitude, she sits, becomes still, and in the moment. She shared that, when difficult decisions arise, her practice enables her to stay calm and grateful for whatever comes. Gratitude provides her with a foundation and a sense of peace.

...gratitude helps with [tough decisions] because you're always giving thanks for everything that you have and the more you give thanks the more everything works better... I'm truly grateful for my home because it's filled with love and gives me peace at the end of the day.

Over their seventeen years together, P9 and her partner have grown together. Their practices help them to handle whatever comes up with peace, presence, and a shared desire to stay connected. She supports her partner's growth and can count on him to support her continued growth.



I'm still working on [staying calm]. He brings it back because he'll just give me a look like, "Okay, psycho-head." [laughter] He doesn't react... I feel if he reacted more, it wouldn't be very good. So, yeah, I'm still working on that.

P9's experience portrays provides a detailed example of how her practice has shaped her relationship and their home life. She views her practice and her partner as supporting her ability to remain calm in difficult times. Together, through their shared practices, they stay connected while nurturing lighthearted playfulness.

**P10.** P10 is a woman in her 30s who has been with her partner for 6 years, and they have no children. She works full-time in the wellness industry and she and her partner live together in Alberta, Canada. P10 explained that her mindfulness meditation practice began out of a time of struggle. She grew up in a home filled with conflict and from an early age, learned that by staying quiet and busy, she could avoid conflict. She described experiencing insomnia since she was a teenager which continued into her adulthood and led her to rely on sleep medication, due to feeling run down, and overwhelmed, most of the time. While visiting a wellness center, she recalled listening to a meditation, for the first time in her life, and feeling fully present. Since that day, five years ago, she and her partner have been using guided meditations before bed, most nights, which has led her to sleep restfully, and medication free. Her mindfulness meditation practices help her to feel more present in her relationship and other areas of life.

I think I've been able to train my brain to focus on one thing at a time. Much of my life has been spent multi-tasking and mantra meditation, for example, is all about focused attention. Now when I am with my partner, I can notice when I'm present and when I'm not.

By attuning to her emotions, P10 finds she can tap into her intuition through bodily sensation. While she is not reactive, her practice has enabled her to feel safe to embrace all of her emotions with self-compassion and honesty. This has led to self-trust and trust for her partner as well. This deep sense of trust has allowed her to feel relaxed for the first time in her life.

I take time to rest and relax with my spouse and have cultivated the ability to be mindful about asking for help when I need it... It really does feel like a celebration to know that this practice has become a way of life. I feel more relaxed than ever before.

She described her mindfulness meditation practice as making time to step back, slow down, and become still. Her practice supports her in allowing her heart to lead and in that, she feels like she's a better partner. Through mindful walking, meditation, journaling, and smudging, she taps into her breath, thoughts, and bodily sensation which leads to deeper awareness.

My brain is still very busy and the more we talk and apply concepts into our relationship, the more I grow in my own self-awareness. I like [the idea of] spirituality as self-awareness and I feel like together [through our practices] my partner and I cultivate opportunities to uncover aspects of ourselves, in a loving and non-judgmental way.

P10's practice enables her to rest, play, and deeply connect with her partner. They are open in sharing their thoughts and feelings with one another and, together, they find ways to practice mindfulness in their relationship. She shares how her practice leads to connection:

[My mindfulness practice] tends to lead to good conversation and curious inquiries with my [partner]... I feel like I have been able to share my growth experiences with my partner in a way that leads us to connect in a deep way. He's really open to philosophical discussions about ancient wisdom, so it feels like

together we are finding ways to apply some of these concepts into our marriage and the way we show up in the world.

P10 feels grateful for her and her partner's shared practice of unconditional love and appreciation for one another. She shared that for the first time in her life she feels safe to fully experiencing all emotions, that arise. The more she taps into and shares her emotions and experiences, both positive and challenging, the more connected she feels to her partner.

I am grateful and it also leads me to feel deep love for my spouse and myself. We are growing together and, in many ways, we are on the same page with the power of mindful meditation.

P10 and her partner are growing together and learning from each other. Together they have become more discerning and intentional in living more consciously. P10 shared that life feels more aligned, even in times of discomfort. She and her partner have learned how to meet difficulty honestly, while staying connected.

The more we practice mindfulness meditation together, we grow and perhaps as science says, we're rewiring our brains and shifting away from conditioned behaviors, responses and reactions to, instead, be mindful in our communication, planning, business, and how we spend our time as a couple, socially. I guess my practice has led me to feel more discerning in my life and our shared life. As I say this, I am mindful of how much we have grown together since 2012 because we really focus on being curious about each other and finding ways to release old stories that don't serve us, as individuals or as a couple.

P10's experience is an excellent example of how presence enables her to accept all emotions, grow her awareness, and, in turn, deepen her relationship with her partner. Her practice of presence and stillness has helped her foster a deep sense of trust in herself, which has led to a deeper and more authentic connection with her partner. By

finding ways to integrate their practices into their shared life, they continue growing as a couple.

### **Composite Depiction**

The following narrative is written in first person and represents a depiction of the experience of mindfulness meditation in women's romantic relationships. Through the creation of a composite depiction, the heuristic researcher can describe the holistic experiences of the co-researchers, as a group, by combining examples from their stories that form a collective description of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1990). After developing an individual depiction for each co-researcher's experience, I created a composite description that represented the common qualities and themes of the co-researchers, as a whole. Each aspect of the composite depiction expresses the six themes.

Mindfulness helps me to be present in my relationship. By feeling present in my body, I am more present for my partner. I trust myself, speak my truth, I am more aware of the words I use, the tone of my voice, and what's important in my relationship. Throughout the day, I find myself remembering to slow down, be present, and remain calm.

Mindfulness meditation has enhanced my emotional regulation within my relationship. When overwhelmed, I can slow down and liberate myself to move forward with intention. By acknowledging all feelings, life feels more aligned even when discomfort arises. By attuning to my emotions, I can tap into my intuition and trust my body's innate wisdom. I feel calm, love, grounded, and peaceful. Throughout the day, I find myself returning to my intention. I am a better partner as this ripples into my

relationship. By slowing down, in my relationship, I feel less anxious, less reactive, and better able to see situations more clearly.

My practice has helped me cultivate expanded awareness in my relationship. Awareness has led us to uncover all aspects of ourselves with a practice of unconditional love and a shared desire to live with intention. I step back, slow down, and become still. As I go within, I am aware of my breath, my thoughts, and emotions, and better able to tune into my body. By listening to my body, the answers come and I have more clarity around how to support myself and seek connection with my partner. My practice helps me open me up to experience joy and enables me to honour difficulty, when it arises in our relationship. I can see the dynamics of our relationship and am aware of what bothers me. I am better able to notice what I'm holding onto and what I need to let go of. It is comforting knowing that I am safe and open to connection.

My mindfulness meditation practice helps me to have a stronger connection with myself and my partner. When I tap into the part of myself that has always been loving, lovable, loved, and whole, I feel light, spacious, open, and connected. It has changed my life by helping me realize that I belong to something greater and am connected to my partner on a deeper level. I experience a feeling of unity, like coming home, because I was meant to come together with this person. I am comfortable to ask for what I need and can sense what my partner needs. It deepens our connection and makes us care for each other even more. We have so much love and appreciation for each other. Beyond love, we have deep respect for each other. My heart is open, warm, overflowing. We can be open and honest in our communication because our souls know each other. Practicing

meditation allows me to listen, stay open and empathic, while trusting the process. We both have positive expectations as we meet difficultly honestly and stay connected.

I have increased gratitude for myself, my partner and our life together. My practice is often centred on gratitude because I see the incredible results. I am more mindful of all the positives in my life and, especially, in my romantic relationship. It helps me focus on the positive things about my partner and everyone in my life. Everyday, I am grateful for our relationship and our ability to connect. I love who we are together and my practice helps me appreciate our relationship more. It's the small everyday things that make me love my partner more. There's more quietness, joy, fun, and playfulness, in our home. I feel gratitude for all the benefits of the practice, known and unknown.

My practice supports continued growth in my relationship. My practice enables me to rest, play, and grow with my partner. We are curious about each other, meditate together, and are open to releasing old stories, responses, and reactions, as individuals and as a couple. It's magical and there is more love, patience, and acceptance between us. In moments of disagreement, we know it will pass because we're able to see the bigger picture and consider what we need in that moment. We talk about it, connect, or give space because we know we will work through it. When we work through difficulty, it makes us stronger because we are growing together. It feels like we are working as a team as we create space for one another to be seen and heard. I am always trying to understand my partner as we evolve together.

## Creative Synthesis

The creative synthesis is the final stage of heuristic research and is expressed by the researcher in various forms such as: a story, poem, narrative depiction, painting, or another creative expression (Moustakas, 1990). The creative synthesis expresses the universal essence of the experience by illuminating the themes, experiences, and insights gathered throughout the heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). The following creative synthesis was derived from the composite depiction and the exemplary portraits of women's experiences of mindfulness meditation in their romantic relationship.

### ***Beyond Love...***

*I longed for freedom.*

### ***Beyond Love...***

*I longed for acceptance.*

### ***Beyond Love...***

*I longed for clarity.*

### ***Beyond Love...***

*I longed for connection.*

### ***Beyond Love...***

*I longed for appreciation.*

### ***Beyond Love...***

*I longed for expansion.*



***Beyond love I found...***

*mindful presence with you.*

***Beyond love I found...***

*mindful calmness in you.*

***Beyond love I found...***

*mindful awareness of you.*

***Beyond love I found...***

*mindful connection with you.*

***Beyond love I found....***

*mindful gratitude for you.*

***Beyond love I found...***

*mindful growth with you.*



***Beyond love, my beloved...***

*You gave me these gifts.*



*You helped me see them within myself.*



*Together we reflect them into the world.*





## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

The heuristic inquiry and investigation is valid and credible when meaning and essence is derived from an individual's unique point of view (Moustakas, 1990). For this study, each co-researcher was trusted that she met the specific criteria at the time of our interview. I assumed each woman shared authentic and accurate information during the face-to-face interview and when providing additional data. I addressed credibility (i.e., internal validity) by strictly adhering to Moustakas's phases of heuristic inquiry. I also conducted member checking by sharing the individual depiction with each co-researcher in which she was invited to provide feedback or suggest edits. Nine co-researchers approved the individual depictions without changes and one co-researcher suggested an edit which was included in her depiction.

### **Transferability**

Transferability (i.e., external validity) is described as the degree to which the findings can be related to other settings (Twycross & Shields, 2005). As in all qualitative research, transferability (i.e., external validity) was not the aim as the findings from this heuristic research study were not meant to be generalized since it is focused on rich personal analysis and self-reflection (Grey, 2009). As a result of this method, detailed description of lived experiences can enable readers to decide if the people and events may apply elsewhere (Twycross & Shields, 2005).

### **Dependability**

Dependability is considered reliability within qualitative research (Langdrige, 2007). To confirm dependability, I followed Walden University's research guidelines and quality standards and followed my interview protocol for this study. No deviations or adjustments to the plan throughout the study process. I sought guidance support from my dissertation committee, specifically with regards to ethics and issues of trustworthiness.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is considered objectivity, in qualitative research (Langdrige, 2007). Through reflexivity, I maintained an attitude of systematic attention by monitoring personal biases, by acknowledging my positionality, personal perspective and background with regards to this study in which I was also a participant (Malterud, 2001). As a way of containing my biases, I relied on epoché throughout this heuristic inquiry and data analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). The practice of epoché allowed me to describe the phenomenon by setting aside my own experiences. I kept a journal for self-reflections.

## **Results**

The guiding research question for this study was: how do women perceive and describe the effect of mindfulness practice on their romantic relationships? Through this thorough investigation, of 10 open and honest co-researchers, six themes emerged from the data. Since there were no discrepant cases, all 10 co-researchers are represented through the description of the themes. I followed Moustakas's (1990) phases of heuristic inquiry to collect and analyze the data. Once all of the interviews were completed, I

immersed myself into the data until each co-researcher's experience was fully understood. Next, I set the data aside before returning to carefully analyze the data to identify the key words and phrases in each transcription. The key words and phrases were grouped together into larger meaning units and finally into themes. Once the six themes were identified, I immersed myself in the data multiple times to ensure the themes accurately portrayed the essence of the co-researchers' experiences. The six themes identified as women's experience of mindfulness meditation in their romantic relationship are:

1. Heightened presence in the relationship
2. Enhanced emotional regulation within the relationship
3. Expanded awareness in the relationship
4. Stronger connection to self and partner
5. Increased gratitude for self, partner, and their shared life
6. Continued growth in the relationship

### **Theme 1: Heightened Presence in the Relationship**

The first theme to be discussed within women's experience of their mindfulness meditation practice in their romantic relationship is their shared experience of presence within their relationships. Each of the co-researchers identified heightened presence in her relationship as a necessary aspect of connection to her partner. Presence was described in various ways.

P3 describes how her own mindful presence enables her to tap into what her partner needs. She shared that by noticing when he is not present, with her, he typically needs affection and physical touch. She said:

...I mindfully see sometimes that, "Okay, I haven't touched him in a day. I need to just put my hand on his shoulder or rub his back," or whatever the case may be. I need to be more mindful of that. Sometimes if I see that he's not present 100%, that's when I can tell. I don't even really need to ask. I can just sense it.

P5 identified her phone as a source of distraction, in her relationship. Through her mindfulness meditation practice she has become more mindful of the importance of putting her phone aside to ensure she is fully present for her partner. She describes this process:

Especially at home, with my partner. It's like, that person deserves the attention... It's important. To be present, but I'm still guilty of it...something dings, and all of a sudden, I'm like... 'What am I doing? [My partner] was just talking to me. And I stopped [listening]'.

P8 shared that she can notice when she is present and when she is not. She described how, when she has shifted away from presence, she notices herself feeling anxious. In those moments, P8 uses a writing exercise to help her come back into the moment. She described her process:

[Writing] usually brings me back to a present spot because really then I can focus on everything else in my life, instead of dwelling on what I think is a problem.

P10 described how she experiences feeling present. She noted that presence leads her to feel connected and grateful for her relationship. She experienced that during our interview by saying:

I feel present as I discuss this, even though I am recalling past experiences. I am grateful and it also leads me to feel deep love for my spouse and myself.

## **Theme 2: Enhanced Emotional Regulation within the Relationship**

Each of the 10 co-researchers articulated an experience of feeling emotionally regulated within their relationship. They attributed their mindfulness meditation practice as a source of learning how to emotionally regulate, especially in times of difficulty, which they identified often leads to opportunities to talk and reconnect with their partners. Each co-researcher described variations of emotional regulation.

P1 identified that when she started her mindfulness meditation practice, she was less reactive to others while still quite reactive with her partner. She described feeling strong in life while also feeling quite sensitive in her romantic relationship. By maintaining her practice, she has noticed a change, as she shared “I’m more patient with myself and with him. I’m not as reactive with him”.

P4 shared how she and her partner’s past pattern of reacting to one another, has changed through her mindfulness practice. She noted:

The mindfulness practice and how it affects and applies to my relationship with [my Partner] is taking that time and that space to sort of step back for a moment and then usually take a breath and then respond.

P6 described how her partner supports her, during times of tension. She shared that her partner will invite her to notice if she is speaking from her ego or her heart. Her mindfulness practice enables her accept his influence, reflect, and reconnect. She described her process:

My ego is worse because [I am] in that fight or flight mode...[His prompt] will make me question right away. Instead of being reactive or defensive, I’ll think about it and I’ll feel like, ‘Yeah, you are right.’

P7 identified that her mindfulness practice prompts her to always remember what is most important in the moment. By maintaining a focus on their relationship, as a whole, disagreements are less prolonged as they often represent a small aspect of their relationship. She shared ways in which she and her partner stay connected to the big picture:

Just having that moment to remember like, 'Okay, what's important right now? Do I want to get into a really heated debate? Am I that stuck to my opinions that I want this to get into a big, heated thing or can I just loosen my grip a little bit on my opinion so that we can have a nice conversation and then let go and have dinner instead of getting myself worked up or getting him worked up?'

### **Theme 3: Expanded Awareness in the Relationship**

As each co-researcher reflected on their mindfulness meditation practice and the effect it has on their relationship, expanded awareness became an evident component of their shared experience. Each woman described various ways in which she was able to better understand herself and better understand what she needs in order to respect the value within the relationship.

P2 identified her mindfulness meditation practice leads to daily awareness. She shared that her practice allows her to identify thoughts and feelings, rather than dissociate from them. Once when feeling envious, rather than avoiding it or reacting to it, she brought awareness to it by saying to herself, "Oh, envy's coming up."

P4 described an important aspect of her mindfulness meditation practice is creating opportunities to reflect which promotes awareness. She shared the benefits of reflection:

Creating space to reflect, whatever that looks like, what I find is it has created more awareness around the gift that [my partner] is in my life. So I feel like now, daily, [I am] able to step back and see the gift that he is.

P9 shared how her practice supports her in feeling like a better person and how it has enabled her to feel focused. She described how she can quickly become aware when her mind has become distracted:

I become fully aware ... like if my mind's like, "Okay I got to pick up the kids, and then...what are they going to have for dinner", but my mind now, because of the meditation, brings me back like, "Hmm, it's irrelevant." It's always reassuring that everything is just going to work out.

#### **Theme 4: Stronger Connection to Self and Partner**

The co-researchers identified their practices led to a stronger connection to themselves and their partners. This theme was prevalent among all 10 co-researchers.

P2 described how her practice enables her to feel energetically connected to her partner. She shared her experience:

So, I think, especially with the tantric [mindfulness practice] ...they're based on feeling, but that fills into a more, a deeper sexual relationship that...brings another depth of connection energetically beyond the physical or the goal, or whatever.

P3 and her partner have a shared mindfulness meditation practice which has led to deep connection. She shared that she attributes their closeness and connection to their practice together. She said:

Prior to four years ago, I think we were a good couple, and I think we loved each other and we supported each other, but [our practice] just brought us even closer. I can tell when he needs more or when he needs less, he needs space... I guess, I can just sense that without really asking.

P4 described her romantic relationship as filled with desire, connection, and energy. She shared that the energy they have cultivated as a couple ripples out into their

projects, ideas, writing, friendships, and deepens their connection to everything. When asked what that connection to her partner feels like, she said:

Oh it's free, and it's alive, and it's full, and it's dynamic. It's juicy and it's not boring. Really we adventure a lot and we connect and we take time for it and we really want to be together.

P6 shared that she and her partner bring mindfulness into all aspects of their relationship. Whether it be when they are talking, eye-gazing, or being physically intimate, they are vulnerable and feel connected on a deep level.

It connected us definitely on a deeper level because we see sex as a sacred practice...[Mindfulness] definitely brought that intimacy on a deeper level and it connected us more. I could say it's very sacred, it makes it sacred, not just like something you do in your day ...you care about each other.

### **Theme 5: Increased Gratitude for Self, Partner, and Their Shared Life**

The co-researchers described ways in which they experience mindfulness meditation as supporting increased gratitude for themselves, their partners, and their shared lives together.

P5 shared how gratitude also ripples out into her relationship with their friends. The more they express gratitude for what they have, the more gratitude they have. She shared how she feels about her relationship:

This [type of relationship] is what people talk about. This is fun and easy love. And it actually does exist. Where it's not just what people talk about. Which is nice.... It's awesome, every day. I'm grateful for that.

P7 shared how her Metta (i.e., loving kindness) meditation practice warms her heart. When she practices Metta consistently, she feels more generous and grateful for her life and her relationship. She said:



I will get these random feelings of gratitude...it's like these little moments where I feel like my heart swell... [I feel] gratitude for having the practice to lean into and that I want to continue it, because I see the incredible results and experience how it adds to my life.

P8 shared how she uses photos from her life as a way of tapping into gratitude.

She described that she tries to practice gratitude each day. She shared how this impacts her life:

...if I do it more regularly, I find I'm more mindful of all the positives I have in life, and especially in [my] relationship because it's easy to find something negative or dwell on [difficulty]...

P9 shared how her morning ritual of practicing gratitude and stillness creates a foundation for the rest of her day. She noted that she feels grounded and able to release fear and worry and find clarity, through her practice of gratitude.

There's definitely stresses that come along the way and I feel like if we didn't have this mindfulness or this gratitude practice, we would kind of face a lot of issues that other families face, in finding a solution to whatever we may be working on.

### **Theme 6: Continued Growth in their Relationship**

Throughout the interviews, the co-researchers were able to describe their continued growth within their romantic relationships with the support of their mindfulness practice.

P1 described how she and her partner continue to grow together through conversation and acceptance of one and other. She shared that the more authentic they are with each other, the more they are able to love and help each other.

I just feel so much more confident and in love with who I am that I'm able to love him more. And I'm able to show up more. It's just, yeah, it just feels so... different.

P3 celebrated that she and her partner have a shared mindfulness meditation practice. They are dedicated to growing together, as a couple. She shared that when their practice wavers, either she or her partner will bring them back.

I'm happy that we have a foundation and that we just continue to grow on that foundation.

P4 provided rich details into the ways she and her partner have grown together. She described how their deep respect, appreciation, and love has fostered room for continual growth. She believes their deep connection has allowed them to show up for one another in an authentic and meaningful way.

We're certainly not the same people when we got married at 22, but there's a real commitment to honor each other's individual journeys and celebrate that and grow together through continual sharing and like checking in and communicating what's coming up for us and trusting one another's deep connection to self.

During our interview, P5 expressed appreciation for how much her partner has joined her in a shared practice of mindfulness. She shared her newfound awareness of the ways in which they are growing a practice together.

I think, what has come up, is she's actually doing more [mindfulness] than I thought she was. Which is really cool. At the beginning, I was like, "She doesn't like it, she doesn't do any of it," and now it's like, "Actually, she does quite a lot of it."

### **Summary**

The research question for this heuristic study was: how do women perceive and describe the effect of mindfulness practice on their romantic relationships? Moustakas's (1990) heuristic data analysis process was used and resulted in six themes that captured the essence of the experience for all of the co-researchers. The six themes were: (a) heightened presence in the relationship, (b) enhanced emotional regulation within the

relationship, (c) expanded awareness in the relationship, (d) stronger connection to self and partner, (e) increased gratitude for self, partner, and their shared life, and (f) continued growth in the relationship. Guided by the themes, individual depictions of the experience of each woman were created. Next, three exemplary portraits of the experience and a composite depiction, representing the group as a whole, were created. A creative synthesis of the experience of the group was created as the final step.

In Chapter 5, I will provide an interpretation of the findings based on the need to understand women's experiences of mindfulness in their romantic relationships. There will also be a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications of the study including social change, and recommendations for future research related to this study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this heuristic inquiry study was to explore how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships. The focus was to gain a better understanding of how the practice of mindfulness is subjectively experienced in women's romantic relationships, based on the gap in the research literature (Davis et al., 2016; Garland et al., 2017; Quaglia et al., 2015; Wachs & Cordova, 2007; Webb et al., 2013). For that reason, I determined a heuristic research design was appropriate as it was created with the intention of gaining a deep understanding into the essence of the experiences (Moustakas, 1990). With this research design, the researcher must meet the criteria of a participant, or co-researcher. As a part of this process, my experiences with the phenomenon were included as part of the data.

For this study, I interviewed all 10 co-researchers, face-to-face, in a mutually agreed upon location, to ensure confidentiality. Each semi-structured interview process lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Data analysis was completed by relying on Moustakas's (1990) steps and processes for heuristic inquiry. Through my data analysis, six themes were identified as the effects of women's mindfulness practice within their romantic relationships. The six themes were: (a) heightened presence in the relationship, (b) enhanced emotional regulation within the relationship, (c) expanded awareness in the relationship, (d) stronger connection to self and partner, (e) increased gratitude for self, partner, and their shared life, and (f) continued growth in the relationship.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Numerous quantitative studies have confirmed that the practice of mindfulness supports learning and maintaining emotional regulation (Davis et al., 2016; Karremans et al., 2017; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Pepping et al., 2013). Mindfulness has been related to increased connection and emotional regulation within romantic relationships (Cordon et al., 2009; Goodall et al., 2012), perceived support and emotional security with partner (Hertz et al., 2012; Siegel, 2014; Williams & Cano, 2014), enhanced self-awareness (Tang & Tang, 2015). In a qualitative study, McCreary and Alderson (2013) found mindfulness was related to the experience of enhanced sexual intimacy.

My analysis of the data revealed six distinct themes with regards to how women perceive and describe the effect of their mindfulness practices on their romantic relationships. Women identified feeling a sense of enhanced emotional regulation within the relationship which enables them to remain calm, less reactive, and better able to communicate with their partners, during times of difficulty. Through their practices, the co-researchers described experiencing expanded awareness, stronger connections, and increased gratitude for themselves, their partners, and their shared life. Women identified a sense of continued growth within their romantic relationship. These themes will be interpreted in relation to how they confirm, disconfirm, and expand previous research findings as explained in Chapter 2.

**Theme 1: Heightened Presence in the Relationship**

All 10 co-researchers conveyed how their mindfulness meditation practice led to heightened presence with their partners. This confirmed previous research in that Karremans et al. (2017) found that by remaining open to observing present body sensation, thoughts, and feelings, an individual can enhance connection between partners. In the current study, the co-researchers described that by feeling present, physically, they were better able to be present with their partners. The findings help to expand previous findings as each of the women described how their mindfulness practice weaves throughout their day, reminding them to be mindful, present, and less likely to ruminate on hurts, stories or difficulties within their romantic relationships. They identified feeling confident in their communication, experiences, and a desire to continue coming back to presence, throughout the day. This aligned with Wachs and Cordova's (2007) results which indicated that when partners remain present, they see each other clearly, with less judgment, and respond in appropriate and supportive ways.

The co-researchers described being present led to productive conversations, even in times of difficulty which also confirmed that mindfulness enables women to witness and observe emotions and thoughts arise and fade away (Karremans et al., 2017). While unique to each of them, the co-researchers described how their practice supports mindful presence when with their partners. This finding aligns with the research related to mindlessness which Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) defined as a lack of awareness in the present moment, which was found to be related to boredom, miscommunication, and relational misunderstanding. Each of the co-researchers identified presence in her

relationship as a necessary aspect of connection to her partner. Bihari and Mullan (2014) identified changes in relationships were experienced though a shift from an automatic *doing* to *being* present. Some tangible ways in which co-researchers make this shift from doing to being was by being intentional in minimizing distractions, like cell phones, and the ability to catch notice when distracted, and come back to practicing presence which was reported to lead to a feeling of connectedness and heightened ability to anticipate partner's needs. By noticing distraction and shifting an individual's attention back into present moment awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), mindfulness can overcome mindlessness.

### **Theme 2: Enhanced Emotional Regulation within the Relationship**

Another theme expressed by the co-researchers was that their practices led to enhanced emotional regulation within the relationship. Without knowing how to support oneself with an emotional regulation practice, individuals can become dysregulated in their primary relationships, leading to the experience of fear of neglect, hurt, rejection, and emotional or physical pain (Adams et al., 2014; Goodall et al., 2012). This theme confirmed previous studies and provided additional insights into how mindfulness supports emotional regulation within romantic relationship. The women in this study shared how, when overwhelmed, having a mindfulness practice supports slowing down, acknowledging all feelings with less anxiety, less reactivity, and more connection to their partners. The ability to emotionally regulate leads to feeling present, secure, relaxed and connected to oneself and others (Klatt, Buckworth, & Malarkey, 2009; McCreary & Alderson, 2013; Valente & Marotta, 2005). Each of the 10 co-researchers in this study attributed their mindfulness meditation practice as a source of learning how to

emotionally regulate, especially in times of difficulty. By remaining emotionally regulated, the co-researchers shared that they experienced more opportunities to talk and reconnect with their partners. This supports Pepping et al.'s (2013) finding that emotional regulation facilitated the connection between mindfulness and relationship intimacy. The present study also confirmed that mindfulness enhances stress management, restful sleep, and a deeper sense of awareness for self and others (Cordon et al., 2009; Goodall et al., 2012; Pepping et al., 2013).

### **Theme 3: Expanded Awareness within the Relationship**

Expanded awareness within the relationship was a common experience among all 10 co-researchers. This confirms previous research which identified self-awareness and awareness of an individual's partner's inner experience related to improved relationship satisfaction (Krafft, Haeger, & Levin, 2017). The women in the present shared how consistency in practice leads to requiring less time to return to presence, calmness, and awareness. Based on the data, each woman's practice was highly unique, which speaks to the importance of maintaining flexibility and awareness when cultivating an individual mindfulness practice. Regardless of their different practices, the women reported expanded awareness within their romantic relationship. Williams and Cano (2014) identified awareness as the primary mindfulness trait correlated with perceived support from an individual's partner. The co-researchers shared that awareness is made possible by going within, becoming aware of their breath, thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensation. They identified that awareness supports their romantic relationships by enabling them to uncover aspects of themselves and their partner, leading to love and a



shared desire to live with intention. One woman shared how her practice supports her in observing the dynamics of her relationship which leads her to be mindfully aware of what bothers her. Wachs and Cordova (2007) concluded that mindfulness enables couples to be open and receptive which supports acceptance, healthy communication, and responding. Awareness was also described as supporting discernment with regards to how to move forward, with intention.

#### **Theme 4: Stronger Connection to Self and Partner**

All participants in the present study shared that their mindfulness practices led to a stronger connection to themselves and their partners. This confirms and expands previous research which found that mindfulness influences the quality of relational connection (Cordon et al., 2009; Goodall et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2009; McCreary & Alderson, 2013; Valente & Marotta, 2005; Williams & Cano, 2014). Co-researchers in the present study shared that they experienced connection as a feeling of unity, deep respect, appreciation, and honesty in their communication, with a sense of security that their partners will be responsive to their needs. They also shared how mindfulness supports the ability to listen attentively, remain open and empathic, even in time of difficulty or disagreement. By remaining mindful, the co-researchers identified connection as the key to continued growth in their relationships, nurtured through gratitude for their partner.

#### **Theme 5: Increased Gratitude for Self, Partner, and Their Shared Life**

In my study, the 10 co-researchers described how their mindfulness practices led to increased gratitude for themselves, their partners, and their shared lives. This expands

the literature as increased gratitude was not mentioned in previous studies reviewed. The co-researchers identified mindfulness meditation as supportive in cultivating gratitude. They described ways in which they center their mindfulness meditation practices on gratitude. Co-researchers identified gratitude as an intentional focus on the positive aspects of their relationships, including their partner's strengths. The women identified that gratitude leads to more joy, fun, playfulness, and a deeper connection to themselves, their partners, as well as continued growth in their relationship.

### **Theme 6: Continued Growth in the Relationship**

The findings in this study identified mindfulness as a source of continued growth in women's romantic relationships. This aligns with past research on positive reappraisal, a psychological process used to transform affective experience (Mauss et al., 2007) and reconstruct stressful events into meaningful or growth-promoting opportunities (Garland et al., 2015a). The co-researchers in my study identified being curious about their partners, meditating as a couple, identifying and altering conditioned beliefs, and finding new ways to respond to their partners, helped to cultivate growth in their relationships. Garland et al (2015a) identified positive reappraisal as a natural component in the practice of mindfulness in that appraising both positive and aversive lived experiences are necessary for components of growth and transformation. By evolving, growing, and learning through difficulty, the co-researchers described experiencing a stronger connection to their partners. McCreary and Alderson (2013) found mindfulness was a strong indicator of marital satisfaction because of the partners' ability to adapt to change, consider alternate points of view, and remain open to growth and change both

individually and as a couple. The 10 women, in my study, described how their mindfulness practices naturally led to growth as individuals and with their partners.

### **Conceptual Framework and Findings Interpretations**

The conceptual framework used for this study was MMT (Garland et al., 2015a). MMT emphasizes the importance of awareness in relationships with self and others (Garland et al., 2015a). Previous to the current study, MMT had yet to be used in a qualitative study. Garland et al. (2015a) identified a need for better understanding of how mindfulness practitioners shift their experiences from their meditative practice into their day-to-day life experiences and relationships. The current study was centered on understanding how women perceive and describe the effects of their mindfulness practices on their romantic relationships.

MMT was built on the idea that emotional regulation and wellbeing are promoted through two primary mechanisms of mindfulness: reappraisal and savoring (Garland et al., 2015a). MMT includes two hypotheses: 1) the mindfulness reappraisal hypothesis: mindfulness produces meaning through reappraisal 2) the mindfulness savoring hypothesis: mindfulness produces meaning through savoring (Garland et al., 2015b). This section is dedicated to interpreting the findings in relation to these hypotheses.

**Reappraisal.** Reappraisal is defined as the result of how mindfulness impacts the meaning one makes about an individual's own lived experiences (Garland et al., 2015a). Reappraisal is supported through the practice of mindfulness and leads individuals to experience eudaimonic wellbeing, an individual's authentic true nature, purpose, and

meaning in life (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Ryff, 2017). Reappraisal is central to contemporary theories of emotional regulation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and a natural component of mindfulness as appraising both positive and difficult lived experiences as necessary for growth and transformation (Garland et al., 2015a). The findings of the current study provided rich descriptions of the meaning women make with regards to the effects of their mindfulness practices in their romantic relationships. The results revealed that mindfulness leads to a stronger connection, continued growth, and enhanced emotional regulation within women's romantic relationships. The women in the current study identified enhanced emotional regulation enables them to remain calm, less reactive, as well as better able to communicate and grow with their partners, during times of difficulty. These findings support the MMT hypothesis that mindfulness produces meaning through reappraisal.

**Savoring.** Savoring is defined as a self-reflective process aimed at noticing the pleasurable features and positive emotions connected to an individual's lived experiences (Garland et al., 2015a). Through appreciating life's small pleasures, even the most difficult experiences eventually reveal an upside (Croft et al., 2014). The findings of the current study identified gratitude as a supportive factor in women's romantic relationships. All 10 co-researchers shared ways in which they experienced gratitude for themselves, their partners, and their shared lives. This speaks to the importance of emphasizing positive moments of daily life and identifying such moments as meaningful. Savoring is a supportive agent in emotional regulation (Croft et al., 2014; Garland et al., 2015a). This was confirmed in the current study, as the co-researchers identified that their

mindfulness practices led them to learn, access, and maintain emotional regulation, in times of difficulty with their partners. The current study confirms the MMT hypothesis that mindfulness produces meaning through savoring.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study contributed to the literature on understanding how women's practice of mindfulness effects their romantic relationships. Based on the methodology, the findings are contained within the co-researchers' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic inquiry shifts away from quantifying experience to explore the phenomenon of human experience (Moustakas, 1990). The insights gained through this study are limited and must be understood in the context of a more holistic view of how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships. The sample was limited 10 women who were living in Alberta, Canada, in a romantic relationship, and had been practicing mindfulness meditation for at least six months, at the time of data collection. Saturation was achieved by the eighth interview, at which time, there was noticeable redundancy in themes, reported by the co-researcher, when compared to prior interviews.

The findings of this qualitative study are not intended to be generalized, as the data was autobiographical, focused on rich personal analysis, and self-reflection (Grey, 2009). The intention of this study was to provide rich detailed description of lived experiences, which may or may not be applicable to readers (Twycross & Shields, 2005). Throughout the data analysis process, I focused on identifying themes representative of all 10 co-researchers and provided clear descriptions of the findings for readers to decide

how the study may transfer into other settings. Thus, the findings may resonate for some women who have similar experiences to those of the co-researchers.

Within a heuristic study, I met the criteria of a participant and was one of the 10 co-researchers. It was essential that I monitored my own personal biases by acknowledging my positionality and personal perspective with this topic (Ozertugrul, 2017). I had to bracket my personal biases, so the interviews were not led by these biases and the interpretation of data was not skewed. For instance, I acknowledged that my daily practice of mindfulness has positively impacted my romantic relationship. To control for potential biases, I relied on epoché throughout data collection and analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). The practice of epoché allowed me to describe the phenomenon with the intention of setting aside my own experiences (Langdrige, 2007). I kept a journal, for self-reflections.

Another limitation of this study may be that nine of the 10 co-researchers were working in the wellness industry. As a result, they may have held a favorable view of the effects of mindfulness practices than those who work outside of the wellness industry. Through the use of a semi-structured interview protocol, I ensured that the open-ended interview invited co-researchers to describe their lived experiences, as it related to the phenomenon, specifically. I relied on accurate recordings, transcriptions of the interviews, and member checking to reduce limitation issues related to potential researcher bias (Creswell, 2013).

## **Recommendations**

I conducted this study because there was a gap in the literature related to how the practice of mindfulness is subjectively experienced in women's romantic relationships. The sample consisted of 10 women who were currently living in Alberta, Canada, in a committed relationship, with a mindfulness meditation practice for at least six months. Future research could focus on addressing the limitations of this heuristic study by examining how co-researchers experience their mindfulness practice within their relationships, with other populations. For example, this study could lead to further qualitative studies with an emphasis on how the practice of mindfulness effects women's friendships or how the practice of mindfulness effects men's romantic relationships. It is important to note that there was no control for variables due to the nature of the qualitative data. With that said, mixed research studies could be focused on determining how various factors influence women's experience of mindfulness in their romantic relationships. Such studies could contribute to more generalizable findings related to the effects of mindfulness in women's romantic relationships. Overall, considering the gap in the literature, additional research may lead to a deeper understanding of how the practice of mindfulness is experienced within relationships.

## **Implications**

### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

This study may lead to positive social change in various contexts through enhanced understanding of how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships. In this study, mindfulness was conceptualized as the practice of openness,

curiosity (Wachs & Cordova, 2007), discernment, retention, and connected to present moment awareness without judgment (Shapiro, 2009). The findings from this study offer an original contribution to the research literature and provide a foundation for developing future qualitative research related to the practice of mindfulness in women's romantic relationships. As the practice of mindfulness continues to grow within Western culture (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Kabat-Zinn, 1994), research can help to support women in applying the benefits to their romantic relationships. The findings enhance understanding of how mindfulness leads to deeper connection and stability in women's romantic relationships. These findings may help to support those who are working with women in the wellness industry. It is my hope that this study will inspire women to develop or deepen their own practice of mindfulness to support their romantic relationships, and possibly, other relationships. This study may also lead to positive social change based on the effects of mindfulness on romantic relationships. Based on the findings, women may become encouraged to cultivate a practice of mindfulness as a support to themselves and their relationships.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Practitioners in the wellness industry may use the six themes to educate and support therapists, mindfulness instructors, and other providers working with women in romantic relationships. The findings may assist practitioners working with women who become emotionally dysregulated during inevitable times of relational stress. The findings may also support the research on mindfulness-based couples' therapy by better understanding aspects of women's experiences. The findings of this study may also



support mindfulness educators, in providing research-based information to their clients.

As a psychologist and yoga teacher, I plan to integrate these findings into my work, with the intention of educating women in romantic relationships about the practice of mindfulness.

### **Methodological Implications**

Quantitative studies have confirmed that the practice of mindfulness is a strategy used to obtain and maintain emotional regulation (Davis et al., 2016; Karremans et al., 2017; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Pepping et al., 2013). This qualitative study focused on how women's practice of mindfulness effects their romantic relationships, focusing primarily on emotional intimacy. This heuristic study was based on an in-depth review of the recent literature on mindfulness in romantic relationships. Research was needed to help fill the gap within the literature related to understanding how the practice of mindfulness subjectively effects women's romantic relationships. The study was guided by Moustakas's (1990) phases of heuristic inquiry: immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis, until validation of the heuristic inquiry was achieved. The creative synthesis is a way of honoring the immersion, illumination, and explication of the phenomenon in study (Moustakas, 1990). By understanding individual perspectives, this study identified six themes, outlined previously in this chapter. The methodological implication of this study is that an in-depth description of how women's practice of mindfulness effects their romantic relationships was achieved by using Moustakas's (1990) heuristic inquiry.

## **Theoretical Implications**

Heuristic studies explore personal meaning through understanding the lived experiences of the co-researchers (Moustakas, 1990). With an emphasis on meaning-making, mindfulness to meaning theory (MMT) supported the intention of heuristic research. Mindfulness encourages wellbeing and empowers people to shift from stress to self-awareness, leading to a deeper sense of meaning (Garland et al., 2015a). The theoretical implication of this study is its contribution to understanding how women's mindfulness practices effects their romantic relationships. Based on the findings of my study, both of the MMT hypotheses were confirmed: mindfulness produces meaning through reappraisal and mindfulness produces meaning through savoring (Garland et al., 2015b). These findings from this qualitative study provide a deeper understanding into how the practice of mindfulness is experienced in women's romantic relationships.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this heuristic study was to explore how the practice of mindfulness effects women's romantic relationships. This study filled a gap in the research literature by describing how the practice of mindfulness is subjectively experienced in women's romantic relationships. By relying on Moustakas's (1990) heuristic inquiry and Garland et al.'s (2015a) MMT, the findings from this study described the women's experience of mindfulness practice in relation to themselves, their partners, and their shared lives. The study revealed six distinct themes related to how women experience the effects of their mindfulness practice on their romantic relationships. The six themes were: (a) heightened presence in the relationship, (b) enhanced emotional

regulation within the relationship, (c) expanded awareness in the relationship, (d) stronger connection to self and partner, (e) increased gratitude for self, partner, and their shared life, and (f) continued growth in the relationship. The co-researchers in this study shared how mindfulness promotes a sense of emotional safety, self-compassion, and compassion for their partners. A number of the findings from this study confirmed and expanded previous research. The findings of this study may contribute to mindfulness training and interventions in a variety of wellness settings.

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## Appendix A: Demographic Form

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
City of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Age Range:

- ☐ 20-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-64

## Years in Current Romantic Relationship

- ☐ Less than 1
- ☐ 1-5
- ☐ 5-10
- ☐ 10-15
- ☐ 15-20
- ☐ 20-25
- ☐ 25-30
- ☐ 30+

## Length of Personal Mindfulness Meditation Practice

- ☐ Less than 1
- ☐ 1-5
- ☐ 5-10
- ☐ 10-15
- ☐ 15-20
- ☐ 20-25
- ☐ 25-30
- ☐ 30+

Research Purposes Only

CODE: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

### Women's Experiences of Mindfulness in Romantic Relationships Mindfulness Meditation

Date of the interview: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Location of interview: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewee Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewer/Researcher: Melissa Jay

#### Open-Ended Guiding Questions

1. Tell me about your mindfulness meditation practice.
2. When and how do you practice mindfulness meditation?
3. What prompted you to start practicing mindfulness meditation?
4. Why have you continued to practice mindfulness meditation?
5. How does your mindfulness meditation practice effect your romantic relationship?
6. What aspects of your mindfulness meditation practice influence your romantic relationship?
7. What feelings and thoughts come up for you as we discuss mindfulness meditation in relation to your romantic relationship?
8. What other information would you like to add about the effect of mindfulness meditation on your relationship?

#### In closing:

Assure confidentiality, review next steps, and follow-up timeframe.

## Appendix C: Additional Individual Depictions

**P1**

I had this build-up of energy inside of me and I didn't know what to do with it. I needed something. My practice is something I need every day and my morning meditation is a way of grounding myself. Every time I sit down, close my eyes, and focus on my breath, I notice. I notice what I'm holding onto and what I need to let go of. When I step back and see my thoughts instead of feel like I am my thoughts, the path is clear. For me, meditation is about developing a deeper side of my practice, where everything is perfect, right now. Meditation is an anchor that keeps me grounded. It's my medicine. My mindfulness practice is happening all day as I balance my practice with my life, being silly, and the relationship I have with myself and others.

Mindfulness and meditation help me be more patient with myself and with my partner. I'm not as reactive and have been able to create a sense of independence where, if anything happens, I know I'll be okay. For a while, I wasn't sure of that. There's so much about who my partner is and the way we are together that has elevated my life, exponentially. There has been a huge transformation in our relationship and I feel more comfortable just being together, without feeling the need to do or say anything. I love who we are together. I feel more confident and in love with who I am and because of that, I'm able to love him more. Our love feels like a blanket, wrapped up, safe, supported, warm, comfortable, and full of possibility and mobility. Malleable. Because of my dedication in my meditation practice, he has seen and felt shifts in me. I'm more free-spirited, not forcing myself into situations and, instead, trying to have more fun. I am enjoying myself, feeling more awake, and can notice when I need to calm myself down.

My partner loves my evolution. It's magical and there is more love, patience, and acceptance between us. Our relationship is something that I want to prioritize everyday.

## **P2**

My mindfulness practice is happening on and off all of the time. I am noticing all thoughts and emotions arise and pass away. My practice leaves me feeling calm and grounded. As my busy mind settles, I can see and think more clearly, I feel less reactive, and able to notice when I'm stuck in thought. As I go within, I am aware of my breath, my thoughts, and emotions, and better able to tune into my body's subtle languages.

When I tap into the part of myself that has always been loving, lovable, loved, whole, and complete, that is freedom. I feel light, spacious, open, connected, and in the flow of things, just as they are. I have insights into Truth and my spiritual desire keeps me on this journey. Peak experiences, the idea of enlightenment perhaps in lifetimes from now, all fuel the desire. And yet, it feels more like enlightenment is already here and life is more a journey of recognizing and remembering the Truth within. As my personality traits are unveiled, I meet myself with love, kindness, and wisdom to release patterns. By acknowledging all feelings, life feels okay, even when the hardest things come up. I have learned to build myself a virtual shelter where I met grief, rage, and envy. Like boiling a pot of water on the stove, rather than trying to contain it, I just let the steam out which felt natural and clean.

In my relationship, my practice helps me appreciate him. I can see the dynamics of our relationship and am aware of what bothers me. I see it as a time of tension, and take steps to give more space or talk about it or do what I need for self-care in that moment. It feels like good therapy as we meet whatever comes up, even if we don't want to. The ups

and downs are okay. My partner meets me with empathy which feels supportive, loving, new for me, and like I can tell him anything, without judgment. This leads to more love and kindness. My practice helps me maintain my energy and I experience a feeling of unity, like coming home because I was meant to come together with this person. This then intermingles out into life because we are all breathing the same air and not separate. By feeling present in my body, I am more present for my partner. By respecting each other's interests we are encouraging each other to grow.

## **P5**

My mindfulness practice starts with a five-minute meditation, every single morning, and then I write down three intentions for the day. Throughout the day, I find myself returning to my intentions and remembering to slow down, be present, and remain calm. I come back to my intentions because they come true. My practice helps me feel more present, more connected, and like myself. It's a practice that helps me notice when I feel distracted or overwhelmed. It is beneficial, feels good, and is evolving.

My partner celebrates and supports my morning meditation practice and tells people about it. We support each other and respect our differences. I am always trying to understand my partner and what she needs. Alone time, being quiet, reading, and being home fills her cup, and, as I continue growing, I need a mixture of socializing, alone time, and time in nature. We have a good balance. I feel supported by her in everything I do and can recognize that we have more similarities than differences in our relationship. Our shared mindfulness practice happens before we eat together. We say three things we're grateful for, take two belly breaths, and take one smell of the food. It is a really nice way to start our meal and to connect with each other, especially after a busy day. I

feel at my best around the dinner table, in conversation, while enjoying good food. For me, that feels like complete happiness. There's no worries, there's laughter, light, and no stress. We are present with what we have and we're so grateful for that.

When we're in the mountains, there's a sense of ease, time slows down, and I feel lucky. Our relationship is fun, easy, and full of love. We have so much love, respect, and appreciation for each other. Every day, I'm grateful for that and her. It's the best relationship I've ever been in. I feel like I get to marry someone I love who is also my best friend. I'm so open to continually evolving with her and can remain open because it's part of who I am.

#### **P7**

Through grief, I was pulled to yin yoga and meditation because I was drawn to a deeper sense of discovery. I knew that I needed space to let what I was feeling move through me and really understand it deeper. My practice helps me experience a cool head and warm heart. I create a really stable and calm place for my mind to rest so I am less reactive and opened to mindful awareness. It feels spacious, open, and freeing. My heart practices support me in feeling more generous, less annoyed, and I experience random feelings of gratitude where I feel my heart swell. My practice helps me open my heart to more fully experience the joys of life, too, while honouring difficulty, as well. Mindfulness and meditation help me make choices, from moment to moment, with intention.

When I prioritize my practice, I am less reactive, irritable, and more compassionate. I am able to be in the present moment for myself and my partner. When I am present, I am aware of how I am speaking, the words I am using, my tone of voice, and what's

important. What's important is to have a good conversation, to share my opinion, and stay connected to a heightened level of self-awareness of myself, in our relationship and conversations together. I appreciate him so much. He is patient and has my back, which is lovely, scary, vulnerable, and so worth it because we are connected and support each other. In moments of disagreement, we know it will pass because we're able to see the bigger picture and stay focused on what's important, which is love, family, and friends. Practicing meditation allows me to listen to what he's saying and what emotions are there so I can be empathic with him. Beyond love, we have deep respect for each other. I feel gratitude for having my practice to lean into because I see the incredible results and experience how it adds to my life and allows me to interact with everything more fully. I feel gratitude for all the benefits of the practice, known and unknown.

### **P8**

I try to commit to my daily mindfulness practice of gratitude, meditation, or mantra meditation. Meditation calms me down and helps me feel focused. Often, I meditate in a reclined posture which supports an open heart, my focus on breath, and then I count my breaths. When my mind is pulled away, I observe that, let it go, and come back to my breath by resetting the count. I notice myself slow down, taking deeper breathes, I feel less reactive, more clear, and positive. I am more calm and present for myself and with others. My daily practice is often centred on my gratitude practice. To tap into gratitude, I look at a picture and write things I feel grateful for as I look at it. Throughout the day, if I feel frustrated, I will stop, look at my phone, find a picture, and type a few things I am grateful for. It feels like a reset and helps me be mindful of all the positives in my life and, especially, in my romantic relationship.

By slowing down, in my relationship, I feel less anxious, less reactive, and better able to see situations more clearly. My partner is very spontaneous, I am more of a planner and this can cause some tension between us. My gratitude practice reminds me to not get down about things and to focus on the positives in my partner and everyone in my life. I feel calm, love, happy, and peaceful. Together, we practice stepping back. Then we are better able to listen to each other and talk about things more calmly. If we have a disagreement, I might write, mindfully, which brings me back into the present. When I write, I am reminded to make time for me. I love to share my practice with others and want to talk about my practice more with my partner. When I speak my truth it helps me practice more because it is not an elusive idea. By using mantra meditation, I am reminded that I am loved, I am a loving partner, and I can notice a shift of confidence within myself with my partner. Rather than dwelling on what I think the problem is, my practice helps me communicate better by remembering that we are in this relationship together, trying, even when it's not perfect.

### **P9**

I like to get up early, before my family, to practice gratitude and stillness. Before work, I take at least two minutes to ground myself by sitting down and focusing on a light, a crystal, a candle, and allow everything to just melt away. Through my practice, I feel my energy relax and drop into being fully present, and connected to Source or God. When I practice gratitude, I sit, am still, and in the moment I have created. I visualize space within my mind and there's peace from creating serenity for myself. My mind starts to go to a calm state and makes me calmer. My energy runs high because of my meditation and gratitude practices. Because I have laid this beautiful foundation, in my

morning ritual and practices of gratitude and stillness, I am less reactive to people around me.

My partner has always been of a meditative mind. I admire how he can just be. He is more calm and able to find meditation quickly. Our practices help us handle whatever comes our way with more playfulness, rather than seriousness, and we feel more balanced. Our relationship is a constant giving and taking, where the other person is the calm within the storm, and, because of that, the storm dissipates. We're connected to the earth, to the Source, grateful, grounded, and can trust the process. When stuff's going on, we talk about it, it feels peaceful and we know we will get through it. We both have positive expectations and shared mindfulness. Our gratitude practice helps us find a solution to whatever we may be working on. We are comfortable within each other. We have a beautiful relationship. It's so meant to be. It is bliss. Our practices reflect on our children, as well. There's more quietness, joy, fun, playfulness, and it's a calmer environment because they're following by example. And it all comes back to gratitude and the meditation which feels empowering. Meditation is the gateway to healing.

**P10**

As I step back, slow down, and become still, I am okay, just as I am. My practice is happening throughout the day, in wakeful mindfulness. Through mindful walking, meditation, journaling, and smudging, I tap into my breath, thoughts, and bodily sensation with intention. It feels right and meant to be. When in nature, the open space & wooded trails & wise trees ground me in feeling connected to myself, to everyone, to everything. My practice supports me in slowing down, being intentional, and allowing



my heart to lead. When overwhelmed, I can slow down and liberate myself to move forward with intention. I am a better partner as this ripples into my relationship.

My practice enables me to rest, play, and grow with my partner. Spirituality as self-awareness has led us to uncover all aspects of ourselves with a practice of unconditional love and a shared desire to live consciously. We are curious about each other, meditate together, and open to releasing old stories, responses, and reactions, as individuals and a couple. We're more discerning. As I practice being present, he notices, and it fills me with deep love and respect for him. Life feels more aligned even when discomfort arises. We meet difficultly honestly and stay connected. I accept myself, just as I am. I accept my partner, just as he is. By attuning to my emotions, I can tap into my intuition and trust my body's innate wisdom. I used to look to others as a barometer for how safe I was, and now when I get still and quiet, I can engage in a productive and open dialogue with my spouse, free of blame, defensiveness, and hurtful disconnect. It is safe. I am safe to embrace all of my emotions with self-compassion. I trust myself and therefore trust our love too. Embracing connection, love, and understanding, I feel proud, hopeful, loving, and loved because we are on the same page. For the first time in my life, I can relax because I am okay, just as I am.